DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 788 EC 301 599

AUTHOR	Markoff, Annabelle M.
TITLE	Within Reach: Academic Achievement through Parent-Teacher Communication.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-87879-955-9
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	126p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Academic Therapy Publications, 20 Commercial Blvd., Novato, CA 94949-6191 ($16.50, prepaid orders add $2.50 postage and handling; purchase orders for more than $15 add 10%; $2.50 minimum).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Change Agents; Communication Skills; Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; Interpersonal Competence; Language Acquisition; *Learning Disabilities; Outcomes of Education; *Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; Parent Student Relationship; *Parent Teacher Conferences; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Special Needs Students; *Student Development; Teacher Student Relationship; Thinking Skills

ABSTRACT

This guide to fostering parent-teacher cooperation in the education of children with special needs, especially children with learning disabilities, offers a structure and process to maximize the effectiveness of parent-teacher meetings and other forms of communication. An introductory background chapter reviews the history of special education, testing issues, and placement and instruction issues. Specific attention is given to the state of the learning disability field. The eight chapters following the introduction each consider different aspects of the parent-teacher relationship. Discussions focus on: (1) parents as agents of change (their attitudes, adjustment, and advocacy role); (2) a structure for parent-teacher conferences (it is proposed that these should cover the child's social/emotional, physical, and academic behavior); (3) the steps in the conference process (observing, planning, implementing, evaluating, and modifying); (4) the development of thinking skills; (5) oral and written language development as parallel social interaction communication skills; (6) other factors that impact learning (e.g., changing expectations and school demands, regular classroom placement); and (7) other factors that influence educational outcomes (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, and commitments). The final chapter provides a review of the book's principles, emphasizing parent-teacher cooperation in the academic and social/emotional development of the child. (Contains 45 references.) (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED350788

Within Reach: Academic Achievement Through Parent-Teacher Communication

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Arleta Quesada

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Annabelle M. Markoff, Ph.D.

EC 301599

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Within Reach:

Academic Achievement Through Parent-Teacher Communication

Annabelle M. Markoff, Ph.D.

Editor: Betty Lou Kratoville

Copyright © 1992, by Annabelle M. Markoff. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the publisher.

Academic Therapy Publications
20 Commercial Boulevard
Novato, California 94949-6191

International Standard Book Number 0-87879-955-9

1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Markoff, Anabelle Most.
Within Reach : academic achievement through parent-teacher communication / Annabelle Most Markoff.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p. 119).
ISBN 0-87879-955-9 : $16.50
1. Learning disabled children--Education--United States. 2. Parent-teacher relationships--United States. 3. Home and school-United States. I. Title
LC4705.M38 1992
371.9--dc20 92-17388
CIP

Contents

Foreword v

Background 7

Chapter 1
Parents - Agents of Change 35

Chapter 2
The Structure for Parent-Teacher Conferences 49

Chapter 3
The Steps in the Process 63

Chapter 4
Thinking Skills 77

Chapter 5
The Importance of Language 83

Chapter 6
Other Factors That Impact Learning 93

Chapter 7
Other Factors That Influence Educational Outcomes 101

Chapter 8
Teaching Children at School and at Home - A Review 107

Bibliography 119

Appendix I
Goals for Improving Handwriting 123

Appendix II
Parent-Teacher Conference Checklist 125

Foreword

Never before has the need for a parent-teacher partnership been defined and explored with more insight, expertise, and humanity than it has in *Within Reach: Academic Achievement Through Parent-Teacher Communication*. Clearly, the author had the interests of both parents and teachers in mind when she wrote this book. The responsibilities of each member of the educational team (including the child) are carefully and logically articulated.

Dr. Markoff confirms that parent involvement in the education of their children is a critical dimension to student success. Boards of education throughout the nation now support the idea that a child's education is a responsibility shared by school and family and that to educate students effectively, schools and parents must work together as *knowledgeable* partners. We already know that students learn better if, in addition to being provided an appropriate instructional program, they receive the continuing support of parents and other adults. And we also know that regardless of the communities they serve, schools can develop effective programs to involve parents in the education of their children. This is particularly important for children with special learning needs.

To put the entire dimension of special education/learning disabilities in sharp focus, Dr. Markoff begins with an overview of education for the handicapped through the ages. She then moves onto her main premise, namely (1) if they are to be truly helpful to their child, parents must become knowledgeable about their child's school performance and academic needs as well as understand the many facets of learning disabilities, and (2) if they are genuinely interested in seeing a child prosper, teachers must be open to the multitude of possibilities for changes in curriculum, setting, and approach that will meet the individual needs of the child.

Dr. Markoff emphasizes the importance of parent-teacher conferences to discuss their common interest, their common bond, their ultimate goal - the well-being of a single child and ultimately of all children. There is a *structure* and a *process* to be followed in such meetings, and these are set forth in great detail, providing new information for parents and a refresher course for teachers. This meticulous guide will insure that both parents and teachers are coming from the same place and heading toward the same destination, and it provides a common reference for staying on course throughout the school year.

A parent-teacher partnership means that parents participate as collaborators, problem solvers, co-decision makers, advisers, implementers, and supporters. Even if willing, many parents will have little idea of how to go about filling these roles. It is Dr. Markoff's mission to point the way. At the same time she alerts mainstream and special class teachers to the contribution they can make and the role they can and must play in the academic life of the child with learning differences. All of her suggestions are "within reach" of the caring parent and the responsible teacher as they assume their very special roles.

Betty Lou Kratoville
Editor

Background

Tell me, and I'll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I'll understand.

— Native American Saying.

Special education is not a new area of educational concern. However, learning disabilities is a comparatively recent category and, in many ways, different from other kinds of handicaps. A group of students was identified about 25 years ago who were not retarded, emotionally disturbed, sensorially or physically handicapped, nor could they be described as low achieving in all areas. While these children have been classified as "handicapped," their handicap is different because they are *able* youngsters, often gifted when measured by intelligence tests, yet they have difficulty learning in school. Everyone has unevenly developed thinking processes to some degree, but in this group, the differences are often startling and incapacitating and without special assistance may have lifelong consequences.

It would have been more fortuitous for this population had they been educated in accordance with their abilities and included with the special education population who is gifted rather than with those educated according to their disabilities. Educating all children, especially the low achieving and the handicapped, as if they are gifted is an important idea. Currently, the gifted are provided with educational experiences that are essential for the cognitive development of *all* children. Parents need to understand this concept, and this book will elaborate on it.

The learning disability field is a welcome addition to educational distinctions. Yet some of the earliest theories and practices serving behaviorally disordered, physically handicapped, deaf, blind or retarded students still hold sway over the design of education programs for the learning disability population. These ideas may be responsible for the lack of success for many LD students. Some of the practices are appropriate, and some are inappropriate. Those that are inappropriate have a distinct negative effect on the achievement and self-concept of children who are selected and labeled for special assistance.

Not only do early special education concepts still influence the education of children labeled learning disabled, but some of the philosophical concepts that underlie regular education have also played an influential, negative role in shaping curriculum design and placement options for LD youngsters. Some of the practices selected for the education of the learning disability population have produced results that are currently questioned by leaders in the field and by parents,

for it is obvious that many children are not learning as well as they might.

Numerous children who early in their educational journey were placed in special education classes, including part-time placements, have not made sufficient progress, and, indeed, they form a large percentage of those who drop out of school. Change is always slow to effect, but when its need is clear, it is always possible. The needs of the children called "learning disabled" are very clear. Perhaps an understanding of their needs will overflow and will be of assistance in designing instruction for those called "low achieving" as well, who now receive no special assistance at all.

Historical Overview

Today we know much more about learning and behavior, but our models for delivery of special services and the processes and content of instruction are still heavily influenced by old ideas and practices.

Hippocrates shifted early thinking about the problem of the individual whose behavior was different. He moved from the idea that the person was possessed by evil spirits to the conception of difference as a disease. Certainly the phrase "Susie has a learning disability" still often conveys this idea. Ancient treatments included diets, hydrotherapy, and blood letting. Today, treatment of deviance still follows a medical model developed for disease and an educational model developed for retardation and sensory deprivation.

Historically, aberrant behavior was explained through mythology, superstition, and fear. Today we know much more about learning and behavior, but our models for delivery of special services and the processes and content of instruction are still heavily influenced by old ideas and practices.

Early Noble Experiments in Special Education

One of the first programs that served as a model for modern special education was started in the mid-16th century when a Spanish monk, Pedro de Ponce de Leon, taught a few deaf children to speak, read, and write. In the 18th century the education of the visually impaired developed in France where a school called the National Institution for the Young Blind was opened that admitted both blind and sighted students. Those educators understood the importance of not separating the blind from sighted peers (Hunt and Mann, 1987). The education of the retarded also started in the 18th century and relied on the work of physicians who were the earliest professionals to design educational programs for this group.

Itard and Systematic Stimulation

Jean Itard was a French physician. It was he who decided to educate twelve-year-old Victor, the "Wild Boy" who had been captured in the forests of Aveyron. Itard believed the mind was a blank slate on which could be recorded appropriate learning and sensory experiences. He began a five-year program of stimulation that made great differences in Victor's behavior, but did not "cure" him. Victor's treatment included hot and cold baths because earlier hydrotherapy treatments had been traditional in the education of behaviorally different individuals. Itard died, disappointed in the results of his efforts. Today we have more understanding of the importance of the *early* developmental period and its entwinement with the essentially social nature of the development of "intelligent" behavior. If Itard had found Victor earlier, his efforts might have had a very different outcome. But Itard did prove that behavior changes were possible and set the stage for education as the means for change. That is the important issue about his attempts

Contributions of Seguin and Montessori

Edward Seguin in France and Maria Montessori in Italy both contributed to enunciating a program based on the whole child, individualizing education, basing curriculum on the level of current functioning, and emphasizing the harmonious relationship between teacher and child. (These concepts are frequently suggested in current IEP programs.) Seguin's sensory training procedures that develop visual, auditory, and kinesthetic skills were incorporated into Montessori methods and are widely used throughout the world for handicapped and non-handicapped students.

Seguin came to the United States in 1848 and established the Pennsylvania Training School for Idiots. His emphasis was on education, not custodial care, a major change. As funding was scarce, custodial care had been the major mode for special education at the end of the 1880's.

The principles that Itard and Seguin set forth that are still the cornerstone of special education interventions also included the idea that individual differences need to be determined through observation and assessment and that experimental training needs to follow with tasks relevant to everyday life. Their philosophy that even children with severe handicaps have the capability of learning is the basis of programs for the unevenly developed individuals who comprise the learning disability population as well as for other special education populations. Individual observation and curriculum design based on the belief that students who are sensorially or intellectually different can learn are positive contributions from the past.

Montessori, who was the first woman to receive a medical degree in Italy, took up the work of Seguin and Itard and opened the Orthophrenic School for the Cure of the Feeble-Minded in Rome. She was spectacularly successful in teaching children who were orphans and those described as mentally retarded to read and write. When she came to the United States for the first time, she was not well received because the belief that the retarded could learn was not widely held in this country. Over a period of time Montessori began to broaden her focus to include children who were not handicapped. Subsequently, she opened a school for non-handicapped youngsters and was equally successful with this population .

Today her educational ideas are more widely used with preschool, middle class children, and minorities than in special education. However, many of her ideas are also incorporated in special education curriculum designs.

Pioneering Work in Brain Injury

Most of the work in the United States (Strauss and Lehtinen, 1947) continued the avenue of research that had been initiated by James Hinshelwood (1917) and Kurt Goldstein (1939) and added information on brain-injured soldiers and children to explain the difficulties for the learning disability population. They embraced the explanation of either injury or genetic dysfunction as the basis of reading difficulties and gave little consideration to the lack of stimulation or different rates of learning or lack of language skill.

For the most part, the student bears the burden of inadequacy. It is simpler to view the problem as in the child and relieve others of responsibility for their part in the problem.

Even at present there is no reliable way to determine which issues—injury, genetics, brain abnormalities, illness, chemical imbalances, developmental rates, social environment—are the cause of school difficulties. Yet the most prevalent belief is that the problem is "in" the child. However, certain terms are no longer in vogue; e.g., minimal brain dysfunction or neurologically handicapped as descriptors are now infrequently used. A few believe the problem may lie partially with the parent, the school, or society and that the causes may be multidimensional and complex. For the most part, the student bears the burden of inadequacy. It is simpler to view the problem as in the child and relieve others of responsibility for their part of the problem.

Gillingham-Orton/ Fernald Approaches

Before learning disability concepts were developed, two approaches emerged in the United States for teaching students who were having difficulty learning to read. Though strikingly different in their conception of the reading process, they both embraced the notion of a dysfunction in the brain related to visual perception. Agreeing that

the problem was a visual perceptual one, Gillingham-Orton in the eastern part of the United States called the problem "strephosymbolia"—twisted symbols. Grace Fernald in the West called the problem "word-blindness." Both were influenced by the work of Hinshelwood, who earlier had called reading problems "congenital word blindness" and linked the problem to visual perception rooted in brain damage and neurological dysfunction .

The Gillingham-Orton approach was organized on the work of Samuel Orton (1937), a neurologist who was interested in reading and speech problems. Anna Gillingham (1966) was a teacher who, with B.W. Stillman, developed a program to work with his patients. They organized the spelling patterns of English into easy to more difficult categories and taught them to children, using tracing and repeated practice to assist with visual perception of the letters and spelling rules.

The Fernald method was a "whole language" approach and based reading on an interest of the student. The student picked a project, did research with the help of a tutor, wrote about the project and studied the words needed in the writing, using tracing to deal with the visual perceptual problems and controlled recall of the words to deal with memory problems. There was no patterning of words because learning the words occurred as they were needed in context.

Both methods assumed that the touch and movement of the finger and hand in tracing delivered visual information about the word to the central nervous system, which the eye was not picking up. The Fernald method required one-to-one instruction and was time consuming and slow. The Gillingham-Orton approach was adapted by Beth Slingerland so that it could be taught to groups of children and is widely used in a systematic approach. The Fernald method is not utilized by most special education teachers because of its lack of a systematic organization to mastering spelling patterns.

Piaget—Stages of Cognitive Development

When compensatory education proponents adopted a Montessori curriculum model for their primary mode of intervention, they also turned to Jean Piaget for guidance. Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, studied the development of his own children and came to some remarkable conclusions about cognitive development or the development of thought processes in children. He believed that children progressed through definite stages. He felt as children grew and internalized experiences, they assimilated them. The experiences then allowed building internal schemas or cognitive structures (sets of stored

experiences). As experience and growth continued, the child went through a continuous process of assimilation and change in cognitive structure or what Piaget called accommodation. New abilities appeared in stages as this invariant process progressed with growth. These pre-existing schemas, structures, and stages based on previous experience determined what a child could learn. Indeed, from this theory, it can be postulated that perceptual function may be partially or wholly determined by stages of cognitive development.

Head Start and cognitive curriculum programs have demonstrated what a positive effect a Montessori-Piaget combination can have on learning without any of the test/direct instruction/teacher-control-of-learning models currently used with the learning disability population.

Piaget did not place emphasis on language development and its relationship to cognitive development, nor did he place emphasis on human interactions and their influence on cognitive function. But Head Start and cognitive curriculum programs have demonstrated what a positive effect a Montessori-Piaget combination can have on learning without any of the testing/direct instruction/teacher-control-of-learning model currently used with the learning disability population.

Head Start

J. McVicker Hunt had a great deal to do with the design of the Head Start programs in this country. His book *Intelligence and Experience*, written in the early 1960's, was a recapitulation of Piaget's theories of cognitive development. Hunt's conclusion, based on Piaget's work, was that IQ is not fixed and that the quality, quantity, and variety of the individual's experience determines the quality of cognitive behavior.

Rejecting testing and seeking a curriculum model, McVicker Hunt searched to find who might offer an alternative. Montessori was selected. He felt that the decisions about learning for any child could not be made entirely from the outside or by others or by test. Choice and personal interest were important considerations in the curriculum model he chose. It is a conclusion now being considered by the leaders in the learning disability field thirty years later.

John Dewey

John Dewey (1916) also had an influence on American education during the early part of this century. He believed that the role of education was to find the individual's aptitudes and train them, that school was not a preparation for life but is life. He believed that children "learn by doing" in purposeful action which *they* determine. He advocated play, construction, use of tools, and contact with nature, with oral and written expression and activities as the basis for learning. There was emphasis on student planning, problem solving, cooperative learning, and self and group evaluation. The process was highly structured by the teacher, but the activities were carried out by the students. When it was implemented well in the classrooms, it was

wonderful to watch. It frequently involved noise, building things, being "out of seat," actually pretending members of the group were Indians or part of whatever community was the subject matter. There was an emphasis on integration in learning subject matter and on individual purpose. Many teachers could not "control" children in this framework. Dewey's theories lost favor during the years after the Second World War when there was a reaction against "progressive education" and a return to the basics and the 3R's.

His theories are still used with the gifted although infrequently acknowledged, but are largely precluded from the education of average children and the learning disabled because of programmatic limitations as well as theoretical ones.

Segregated Placement vs. the Regular Classroom

Throughout the 1800's individuals with handicaps were educated largely in segregated facilities, and in many educational settings that tradition still holds today. For the mild learning disabled student, however, there is growing realization that regular class placement would be an excellent learning environment if sufficient support services could be provided. At the present time this option is widely debated, with regular education resisting the return of the learning disabled to the regular class without staff training programs and extra classroom teaching assistants.

Regular class placement would be an excellent learning environment if sufficient support services could be provided.

The resistance also is rooted in regular education's traditions about students who do not fall into average ranges of skills and performance. Regular classroom teachers believe a child who is diagnosed as learning disabled requires instructional techniques for which they have had no training. LD students are unique—they are *able* but receive educational interventions only in response to low test scores and what they have not learned or may have difficulty learning.

Compulsory Education

Around the turn of the century, several influences changed the educational scene for individuals with handicaps. Compulsory attendance laws were initiated in the United States. Students who previously had dropped out of school were now required to remain. By 1918 all states had compulsory education laws whereas earlier only upper middle class children were systematically educated. With the advent of compulsory education, working class children were placed in classes with middle class children, and teachers found it difficult to teach some of them. Students who did not come from privileged backgrounds had not been given enriched learning opportunities, good medical care, proper nutrition, and all of the other benefits that provide a foundation for learning. They had not had equal oppor-

tunities to "learn how to learn," and many of them did not bring "readiness" skills to school. There was little discussion at the outset about the social-cultural basis of intelligence, and programs began to be initiated to systematically separate those who tested below average on intelligence tests.

At about the same time, the French government appointed Alfred Binet to study ways to identify students who could benefit from the standard school curriculum and to remove those who could not. The test was translated into English, and in 1916 Lewis Terman further perfected and standardized the Binet test. It was quickly put into use for a variety of social and educational needs, for ranking and evaluating individuals.

Edward Thorndike joined forces with Terman and during this period developed a variety of scales for evaluating abilities and tracking students, and the educational testing movement was launched. By 1930, 70 percent of students were categorized as bright, dull, and average and were segregated into groups, lanes, tracks, classes, and special schools (Thompson, 1951). Thorndike was also responsible for the part of the movement that came to think it important to view students in terms of individual differences.

The decade between 1950 and the mid-60's was a period of consolidation and expansion for special education. Money was appropriated, laws were passed requiring special education in segregated settings, sheltered workshops were established, special class placement and research were initiated, and advance graduate work in special education was offered. Special classes proliferated. Many handicapped individuals were moved out of institutional settings into public school programs as testing became more widely utilized, and distinctions about groups became clearer.

Testing

Since the advent of the theorists who are called "constructionists," many educators have come to regard intelligence tests as special kinds of achievement tests. They believe that, indeed, there is a certain amount of genetic endowment that comes with all of us at birth. However, these tests do not measure it. The tests have been well standardized and given to large populations who are then ranked by the results. They do measure what has been learned on

the items that make up the test, but they do not attend to social, cultural, or economic factors that the constructionists feel play a decisive role in developing intelligence.

IQ tests, compulsory attendance laws, and industrialization, which demanded skills suitable for assembly line techniques, led to programs of vocational education for lower socio-economic class children, many of whose parents were uneducated and who came to school unprepared for academic demands. Previous to this time, students with mild handicaps or "learning disabilities" were not readily discernible. (Learning disabilities have been aptly termed the "hidden handicap.") As these students frequently dropped out of school in order to contribute to the economic needs of their families, their educational needs were not specifically addressed. In addition, many of them were mistakenly viewed as lacking motivation or lazy.

Observation became more sophisticated, but implementation or instruction still focused only on the undeveloped skills.

As the field accumulated experience, changes occurred. To the existing diagnostic battery were added: language tests; tests of higher level thinking skills; projective tests observing social/emotional behavior; and, recently, tests of personality characteristics (attention, impulsivity, activity level, motivation, dependence, independence, passivity, perseverance, among others). Intelligence and perceptual-motor tests were accompanied by academic tests that observed skills in written language and math.

A New Group–Early Approaches

With the use of intelligence tests to identify and separate the retarded, another group of students began to be identified, students who scored average, above average, or even into the gifted range in overall scores, but who had wide disparities on the sub scores. These children were not retarded or emotionally disturbed and were highly motivated, but they had difficulty learning in school.

Initially, students with mild learning disabilities were given individual or small group instruction for part of the day in special classrooms. Those with multiple or more severe problems were placed in "special day classes" and were differentiated from those diagnosed as retarded, emotionally disturbed, or sensorially handicapped. Sometimes they had social or emotional problems that were regarded as too difficult to handle in regular classes. Some school districts provided special classes for students with language delays or deficits.

The definition of a learning disability, in practical use, sometimes depends on who is defining it, for what population.

Sometimes the learning disability was considered a primary handicap and sometimes a secondary one. The definition of a learning disability, in practical use, sometimes depends on who is defining it, for what population .

This move (defining students who were essentially able and who had already learned some things very well) was an outgrowth of a growing national awareness that, first, education for all was necessary for a free society to function well and, second, that there were different degrees and characteristics in the population of students who had difficulty learning school subjects. These students, with special help, could be useful, productive, even accomplished, and could contribute to society's needs as well as their own.

Medical Model

Parents were in the forefront of the LD movement and provided the impetus in the design of specific special educational interventions and programs suitable for this unique group of youngsters.

A major shift in special education occurred in the early 1960's. The Kennedy family had a retarded family member, and it was their interest in special education that gave impetus to services initiated in public schools during that decade. Public Law 94-142 was passed in 1975, and the learning disability field captured the attention of the educational community. There was an aggressive attempt to find students who were able, as measured by IQ tests, but who were not learning sufficiently. It was at this time that they were identified as a distinct group needing special assistance. Parents with the aid of physicians, were in the forefront of this movement and provided the impetus to the design of specific special educational interventions and programs suitable for this unique group of youngsters.

It is not surprising that the model adopted for this population was a medical one. The children were regarded as brain injured, minimally brain damaged, neurologically handicapped, or perceptually handicapped. The inadequacy was viewed as a deficit "in the child." The treatment was an educational "prescription" embodied in perceptual and physical exercises carried out in educational settings and clinics. Educational psychologists, who were already in the schools to observe student populations and differentiate the retarded, the sensorially handicapped, and the emotionally disturbed, now served the "educationally handicapped." This was the broad designation used for all of these categories. Today the term "learning disabilities" is used loosely to describe learning difficulties in all special education populations.

The education of this new group was based on educational practices used for the retarded although it was quite clear that this group of students were intellectually able but were failing in school because some of the skills needed to succeed were unevenly developed. In

recognition of their different status, most LD students went into special classes for only part of the day. However, the focus, despite good intent to provide assistance, was on their inadequacy, not their ability.

Prescriptive Teaching

One of the first books written on educational interventions, *Prescriptive Teaching* (Peter, 1963), accepted the medical model. It laid out a management process borrowed from industry and utilized the battery of tests used for finding the retarded and for ranking children. This book prescribed special instruction for the able students who were failing in school and followed the earlier model of sensory stimulation. It championed the idea that problems for the LD group were perceptual and motoric in nature. Again using the philosophy of earlier theorists, it was a logical progression to adopt available teaching strategies but also to write a prescription just as one would do for a person who was ill.

Lawrence Peter provided a frame of reference for individual teaching that has been invaluable. However, in the whole book there is no discussion of language as a factor in school performance and as an important issue to be explored.

The management process that Peter included was extremely useful. For the first time, a systematic process was provided for diagnosis, for planning, for implementation, for evaluation, and for modification. Diagnosis was predominantly educational and psychological and only occasionally medical. Indeed, many educators proclaimed that education was no longer a mere "art," but was now "scientific."

In fact, in Los Angeles in the late 60's a widely heralded program appeared labeled the "engineered classroom." In this approach, the management process was supported by a carefully sequenced program based on task analysis of subject matter (also called "direct teaching") with pre-prepared sequential workbooks and spiritmaster sheets to which behaviorist techniques were added to manipulate motivation and to reward achievement. The children sat in their seats and worked diligently and got up to get new worksheets and receive their rewards. The engineered classroom ultimately disappeared because it didn't produce the achievement results it had promised.

Perceptual-Motor Theories

The perceptual-motor theories that provided the initial impetus for instruction are:

The Doman-Delacato Theory of Motor Patterning

Children are taken through early motor patterns involved in developmental movement sequences. If the children are unable to perform the movements, their limbs are moved (patterned) for them. The intent is to establish hemispheric dominance and improve or complete neurological development and thus prevent or eliminate learning disorders. This has been the most controversial of the motor training approaches. (Doman is a physical therapist and Delacato, an educator.)

The Kephart Perceptual-Motor Theory

Children are provided exercises in the basic movement patterns: hopping, skipping, running, jumping, catching, throwing, directionality, and balance, based on the concept that movement has a basic relationship to perceptual-cognitive functions. The learning problems of the student are presumed to be rooted in undeveloped motor behaviors.

The Getman Visuo-Motor Theory

A sequential visual motor program was developed to build a foundation for visual perception. Getman, a behavioral optometrist, postulated that aspects of vision are learned. He incorporates motor theories with eye movement issues and sets forth levels of motor functioning.

The Ayres Sensory Integration Theory

This highly systematic and widely used program was developed from the field of occupational therapy. It suggests that physical therapy and exercise can modify brain function and improve motor behavior. Adapted for the LD population, a test and instructional program focus on motor accuracy, perceptual motor skills, figure ground, visual perception, kinesthetic, tactile, and space perception.

The Frostig Program for the Development of Visual Perception

Visual perception had long been associated with children's difficulties in learning. Continuing this tradition in the 60's, another pioneer, Marianne Frostig, developed a test and a training program that observed five aspects of visual behavior: visual-motor coordination, figure-ground perception, perceptual constancy, position in space, and spatial relationships. A training program using geometric forms accompanies the test. This single test served to make teachers aware

of categories of visual perceptual skills. While it is no longer widely used, those trained in its use did transfer the training and were able to recognize these problems in the context of the school skills they were teaching.

Less attention was given to auditory perception, but discrimination of sounds and memory of sentences were usually included in a test battery and provided the basis for instruction. The *Wepman Test of Auditory Discrimination*, the *Goldman-Fristoe Test of Auditory Discrimination*, and some of the subtests in the *Detroit Tests of Learning Abilities* and the *Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test* were widely used. The auditory perceptual tests did use language symbols as content, and there was more likelihood for design of training from this information. But early on there was no systematic inventory of language skill as a possible factor in the student's learning problems unless the language difficulties were very obvious.

Behavior Management

The incentive-reward emphasis was based on the work of B. F. Skinner, who appeared in the field of learning in the 1950's and 60's. He believed that behavior depends on or is a function of immediate and past environment plus genetic contributions. Primarily, his theories deal with the child's existing environment and how it can be arranged to promote appropriate behaviors. He used incentives to elicit appropriate behaviors and to reinforce and stabilize them. His theories have been heavily utilized in special education and are effective when applied systematically along with supportive accepting environments and holistic teaching. Behavior management techniques and many parenting programs have included use of his theories. Task analysis and behaviorist techniques are useful and widely utilized in both general and special education, but they are not successful when they are utilized to the exclusion of other approaches.

Meanwhile LD students were instructed using an extremely limited program that was absolutely literal in translating some very acceptable theories – i.e., movement was essential to cognitive development; some practice in "processing" might be useful; some "direct instruction" was a good idea; and behavior management was a valid educational tool. Other important elements were and are still missing, but awareness of the shortcomings of the programs is developing.

Language

At the same time that Peter was advancing the importance of managing the learning process, a new test appeared, the *Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities* (Kirk, 1961). With its use a major change occurred. It provided a model of the communication process with discrete sub processes. While the test and model of language processing on which it rested have largely been discarded, it did focus the eyes of the whole field on the importance of language observations for the LD population.

There is still a widely held belief that language is sufficiently developed in most children by age five so that reading can be safely introduced in the first grade. Little attention is paid to the wide range of language differences in children. No attention has been systematically paid to the development of phonic abilities at the receptive oral level of language even though almost all early reading materials are based on initial phonic instruction.

Not enough attention is paid to the receptive language competence of students before reading begins.

Receptive phonic ability, or the lack of it, might provide clues to instruction or predict success or failure with the singular phonic approach to reading adopted in this country. Not enough attention is paid to the receptive language competence of students before reading begins. If it is not sufficiently developed at all four language levels (sound, word, grammar, and meaning, fully discussed in Chapter 5), students with undeveloped skills may have a hard time learning to read. Most instruction is geared to averages, and most children learn to read no matter what method is used. But the learning disabled and the low-achieving population are likely to benefit from a more careful language observation.

Whole language theorists provide an invaluable model of developing written language just as oral language is developed: communication based on use in natural exchanges.

Whole language theorists (Edelsky et al., 1991)question the direct hierarchical relationship between oral and written language. Yet if the qualitative aspects of oral language are meager, and if there are unique problems in "cracking the code," it becomes difficult to use written language to enhance receptive language fast enough to protect motivation. These theorists provide an invaluable model of developing written language just as oral language is developed: communication based on use in natural exchanges. It would be wonderful if these ideas were adopted for the learning disabled and low-achieving populations, and phonics were assigned a lesser role. But it will take some time for the country to give up its complete infatuation with the idea that phonics instruction unlocks meaning in reading for everyone.

The Intelligence Test

At the present time ability is usually determined in schools by use of the WISC-R (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Revised). This test is the most frequently used intelligence test administered to the learning disability group. It provides a general achievement measure divided into verbal and performance categories. The verbal portion samples receptive language, general knowledge, reasoning, social judgment, memory, and mental arithmetic. Other skills could be attributed to the verbal portion, but it is categorized as "verbal" because all the items involve listening and giving answers. No visual-motor performance is required. The performance portion presents directions orally and samples visual and visual-motor skills with pictures, puzzles, and geometric forms. Two of the tests require the use of a pencil (the motor part). The results are compared with achievement tests measuring learning in school subjects. If there is a discrepancy and the scores are average or above on the IQ test but the achievement scores are low (a special discrepancy formula is used), the student is eligible to receive special assistance. If there is not a discrepancy, it is assumed the student is working up to his intellectual ability, and special teaching will not make a difference.

The achievement tests most frequently used at the present time are the Wide Range Achievement Test (Jastak, 1984), the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977), and a variety of reading and mathematics tests.

Many professionals feel that there is no difference between the low achiever and the child called learning disabled. The low achiever simply may have had fewer stimulating, nurturing, and protective experiences. Their scores are more even and frequently lower on both IQ and achievement tests.

The power of the belief that the IQ test measures a fixed amount of intelligence as well as the belief that an individual's "intelligence" can be measured is exemplified in the distinction made between these two groups. It also assumes that the two kinds of abilities measured on an IQ test are the only signs that a person is intelligent. The IQ test does measure categories of skills that are very important for success in school: language and visual-motor skill. However, it is not exhaustive of the skills in these two areas, and it tests the skills out of the context in which they are used.

Placement and Instruction Issues

The regular classroom should be a hospitable option for learning disability and other kinds of handicapped students.

Placement issues are now under scrutiny, and there are wide differences of opinion about regular and special class placement for the "discrepancy" group of students. Many children are stigmatized when they are called learning disabled and are required to leave the classroom for special teaching. In many cases, this has a severely depressing effect on their self-esteem, self-concept, and motivation. Presently many parents and professionals agree that one of the prevailing problems for the LD population is that many of them are depressed (Mednick, 1991). Leaders in special education acknowledge this and are considering alternative placement options. Mainly, they are trying to make the regular classroom a more hospitable option for learning disability and other kinds of handicapped students.

Howard Adleman criticizes curriculum in this field, stating that the field must "... expand prevailing approaches to individualizing instruction so that intrinsic motivation is accounted for in a systematic and comprehensive manner." Parents who are learning to be advocates for their children can play a role in extending the options for placement and characteristics of instruction so that in the act of providing assistance, they do not abet the dropout process nor the accompanying depression.

Modality Processing Instruction

Out of context drill and practice with visual, auditory, or motor content is called modality processing instruction. In addition to differing opinions on the theories regarding the motor basis of learning, wide criticism has been leveled at the emphasis on modality processing. In this model, it is assumed that teaching sequencing or short term memory through recall of discrete words or numbers or sentences out of any meaningful context will be helpful. Language or math content may be included, but not necessarily in the context in which mistakes occur. Visual and kinesthetic practice of short or long term memory of geometric forms (recognizing and reproducing them) usually does not improve: (1) phonic ability, (2) the ability to remember words, (3) basic arithmetic facts, or (4) the ability to communicate or receive communications in either oral or written language, all of which make up the curriculum students must master.

Meaning and memory always interact, and the more meaningful the content, the more likely it is to be remembered.

The research overwhelmingly finds that physical skill instruction and visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modality training, when provided as special exercises separated from the academic subject in which the skill is required, do not transfer and improve school subject perfor-

mance. As a rule of thumb, it might be helpful to understand that "meaning and memory always interact," and the more meaningful the content, the more likely it is to be remembered.

Parents, on the other hand, frequently describe modality processing programs as beneficial for their children because improvement is shown in whatever skills are being trained. However, they also agree that for the majority of cases, the child's school achievement is not increased commensurately. This seems to hold true in all controversial therapies.

Direct Instruction

In addition to the dispute over modality processing, there is also considerable disagreement about direct instruction. Direct instruction involves a task analysis of the subject in which the child deals with oral, written language, or math as content rather than practicing the processes of seeing, hearing, feeling, discriminating, sequencing, or remembering with out-of-context content. The subject matter is usually arranged in a "simple to complex" set of tasks, and the student learns the easier or discrete tasks before using the total process. The hope is that the skill will transfer to school subject matter in the case of the modality processing model or to the more complex tasks in the direct teaching model. Both approaches involve drill and practice as the main mode of remediation.

The direct instruction mode, which is based on a theory of "linear" learning, means that the student masters one set of tasks before going onto the next. This usually involves a great deal of drill and practice, paper and pencil, or "seat work." For example, in math some children can understand the complex processes of multiplication, division, fractions, and percentages but can't remember the facts and consequently spend an inordinate amount of school and home energy on low level skills. In reading, this approach makes the assumption that phonics instruction should lead to comprehension. Thus, most of the "reading" time is spent on decoding exercises, learning the relationship between sounds and symbols, and practicing sounding out the words. Consequently, little time is left for reading as a communication process, for enjoyment, or for obtaining information.

It isn't that time should not be spent on learning the facts but not so much time that it precludes higher level instruction.

Sometimes LD students can easily move ahead in mastering complex processes even when they have difficulty remembering the isolated facts. It isn't that time should not be spent on learning the facts but not so much time that it precludes higher level instruction. Indeed, sometimes students will actually be prohibited from reading because of the belief that they should be forced to decode word by word. The

23

decision of a balance in instructional approach needs to be made on an individual basis, but the possibility of making such decisions needs to be present in the instructional repertoire of the professional staff. Too frequently when direct instruction is the curriculum strategy, everybody begins to climb the ladder of tasks from the"bottom to the top"but they never get to the top. We often see that when phonics is over emphasized. Many of the students would do better if the processes from"top to bottom" were also taught.

Deductive and Inductive Processes

Sometimes the two approaches described above are called inductive and deductive. In inducting one starts from pieces and synthesizes them into the whole, and in deductive one starts with the whole and analyzes the process into its elements. It only makes sense to think of teaching both processes to children and to make them aware of what, how, and why they are learning each way.

Holistic vs. Behavioral Approaches

Holistics feel that the two approaches called modality processing instruction and direct teaching result in irrelevant and boring experiences and actually hamper learning. They argue that a rich language curriculum is essential and that it isn't the mechanics of language that requires emphasis, but the communication purpose of language that is usually not understood by the student or taught by the teacher.

Written Language Focus

One of the major concerns in educating students with learning disabilities is with written language: reading, writing, spelling, and handwriting. In the 1960's the field began with these areas as a focus, and little attention was paid to oral language as a base for this secondary symbol system that students must master.

With the advent of the *Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities*, the importance of oral language was acknowledged even though the test has proved inadequate as a model of language processing. The importance of language was also emphasized with the use of the *WISC* instead of the *Stanford-Binet*, which categorizes skills by age level. The *WISC*, on the other hand, categorizes diagnostic information as "verbal" or "performance," and diagnosticians began to become aware of these two categorical dimensions of learning that were often dramatically divergent. The disparity in the development of these sets of skills, which may represent the uneven function of the two sides of the brain, can indicate that there may be great difficulty in school learning.

24

Current Practices

If one reviews the current psychoeducational evaluations provided in schools, the perceptual processing model and the emphasis on phonics instruction with primarily a visual perceptual emphasis still have a tight grip on those providing evaluation and instruction service to LD students.

However, reading problems are no longer viewed only as breakdowns in perceptual processing but are now thought of as resting in psycho-linguistic processes. Frank Vellutino has suggested that the problem for the dyslexic student is a complex linguistic one and that the best strategy for instruction is direct remedial instruction in the reading process rather than on visual perceptual aspects, with both meaning and phonetic approaches emphasized and including supportive language development activities.

Vellutino's suggestion needs to receive more research attention. The reading process needs to be more broadly considered in relation to receptive language. The receptive oral language base the student possesses at the outset of reading instruction needs to be inventoried. Included in the consideration should be the amount, kind, and quality of the experience of the student, and the quality and amount of social interactions. In other words, how much home and early mediation (instruction) in learning has the student had? How much language exchange has the student participated in or has there been little attention to early language development? Direct instruction is also likely to be more successful if all levels of language competence are inventoried, and direct instruction is focused on sound symbol relationships, words, sentence forms, and meaning, and practice is provided in as natural a situation as possible.

Phonics Emphasis– Pro and Con

Until reading is regarded as communication rather than only a hierarchically arranged set of skills, transfer of training will remain a significant problem.

With the LD group, it is widely assumed that phonic instruction will automatically access meaning. This does not happen in many cases. A focus on phonic instruction entirely outside the reading for meaning context can be limited and limiting. Instruction is focused on only one level of language processing, and transfer of training is not provided for. How to teach for transfer of training is a critical need in special education. Until reading is also regarded as communication rather than only a hierarchically arranged set of skills, transfer of training will remain a significant problem.

On the other hand, Jeanne Chall and Rudolph Flesch, among others, have advocated a retreat from the prevalent whole word or meaning based method of teaching reading and have suggested a return to phonics. These professionals believe that phonics is the first stepping stone to unlocking meaning and improving reading skill.

You may recognize in this shift a linear approach to instruction. The country has followed them and, indeed, the 1983 national reading test results indicated that as a nation, phonics skills were at grade level, but comprehension was about two years behind (Chall, 1983).

In order to be successful in learning phonics, a student must be able to hear (1) that sounds differ from each other, (2) that words have parts, (3) how many sounds and parts there are in a word, and (4) where the sounds are. In addition, the student must be able to discriminate letters so that all of the information in the letter or spelling pattern is stored. If a student looks at a word and the auditory skill is not developed, there will be nothing to relate the letter to in receptive language. Of course, there may be visual differences in discrimination skills that will affect reading skill acquisition, but receptive oral language must be developed first.

Psycho-Linguistics

Psycho-linguistics is concerned with the relationship between language and thinking and learning. It is based on the beliefs that children are biologically and genetically disposed to learn language and to think. All children, no matter what language or culture they are exposed to, learn their native language in the same developmental sequence. But just as suggestions have been made about the influence of mediation in the progression of Piaget's cognitive stages, the quality and quantity of modeled language behavior also play a major role in influencing language and cognitive development. Children need the models, but they do not require direct instruction when they learn oral language.

Frank Smith, Kenneth Goodman, Carole Edelsky et al. translate this to the reading process and feel that instead of the emphasis on phonics, the emphasis should be on reading as communication. They also support a "constructionist" point of view and feel that we bring meaning to the printed page. Edelsky and colleagues believe that the issue is not that one system represents the other, i.e., that written language represents oral language, but that reading *is* language and is learned like language. The two systems share certain characteristics: they are social, have interdependent and inseparable subsystems, and are predictable. Edelsky and associates propose that there is no

26

single correct meaning for a text, and each reader constructs a unique interpretation. Their view is not that reading is about figuring out words but that it is about deducting rules underlying communication, of predicting how language works, and about using it for living. It is about creating meaning. They feel that written language need not wait for oral language, but that people can learn vocabulary, syntax, and style directly from written language. They do not regard words as separate entities but crossroads of meaning. They believe children learn by use in a social context, and that's what teachers can help children do. This view is a long distance from the way most special education teachers and parents think about teaching children to read.

The field of psycho-linguistics and now whole language offer great promise in broadening our conception of written language instruction and assisting LD students to use written language as communication in the same way oral language was learned.

As the learning disability field added the issues of language and cognitive process development to its theoretical formulations about the location of difficulties for students, the field entered a more sophisticated instructional arena. The field of psycho-linguistics and now whole language offer great promise in broadening our conception of written language instruction and assisting LD students to use written language as communication in the same way oral language was learned. For the whole group of students who do not profit from phonics instruction, this offers another way that may be more conducive to learning to read.

Fractionated Learning and "Structure"

With the learning disabled, instruction is closely linked to tests, and part-time instruction is provided outside the regular classroom, which tends to fractionate the instructional program. In addition, the adherence to the theoretical belief in direct instruction (drill and practice in a task analysis of the content of instruction) includes a belief in "structure." When a learning disability plan calls for structure, it usually means self-contained special day classes, which are usually limited to 12 students, or part-time instruction out of the classroom. Structure usually means small groups with heavy teacher control of student behavior. It is true that many of the children who appear in the LD population do need to understand limits and consistent, reasonable consequences. But frequently tight adult control destroys motivation and self-esteem and does not provide enough opportunity for self-control to develop. The narrow curriculum, structure, and divided teaching don't leave much time for the ideas of John Dewey or the emerging "holists," favoring active learning, choice, and integrated instruction. All of these are time consuming, and teachers are not trained to instruct in this fashion.

Attention to "Norms"

After the Second World War the development of norms for child behavior was in full swing in the country. Arnold Gesell was observing maturational patterns and developing expectations for "average"

27

performance. Frances Ilg-Ames and Louise Bates devised a "readiness" test given at kindergarten entry with curriculum suggestions based on results. These programs were based on the notion of "wired in" development and the natural unfolding of skills (quite different from the ideas that Piaget was offering). Teachers were advised to wait for maturation and the skills to appear. This belief is still strong in primary education, and it is common practice that children not be referred for evaluation and special teaching in the first and second grades.

The concept that sees difference as negative and "ab" normal is applied like glue to those who are average or slightly below average.

Benjamin Spock, a widely followed pediatrician, also described behavioral norms and supported a *laissez faire* approach to child rearing. It easily followed when so much emphasis was placed on "average" or "normal" developmental performance that difference was seen as inadequacy. While Spock was not the only one to rely on norms, the word itself implies "normal" and adds fuel to the fire of the view that sees difference as negative and "ab" normal. That concept is not applied to the gifted unless they also have significantly discrepant skills needed for school. It is applied like glue to those who are average or slightly below average.

Cultural Issues and Mediation

Reuven Feuerstein was a co-worker of Piaget's and an Israeli psychologist. After the Second World War it was his task to gather up orphaned Jewish children in Europe, the Near East, and Africa and to take them back to Israel. He described the children as performing in the retarded ranges when it came to values, thinking, language, behaving, problem solving, and the myriad of physical, cognitive, and social and emotional behaviors that children pick up from families, friends, and neighbors that, summed up, equal "intelligence," some of which is measured on IQ tests.

Mediation means intervention or teaching by adults and other individuals in the child's life that focuses the child's attention, paces the learning, reinforces approximate achievement, and models behaviors. Feuerstein felt that mediation of learning was a critical factor in the development of cognitive abilities. He suggested that the invariant stages of development might not occur in some children, not because they were deficient, but because mediation was insufficient. He believed that content was immaterial and and that process of mediation was the important factor. His material for teaching is based on the tests he used to observe the children. He did not ascribe much importance to language but felt that individuals differed in the amount of mediation necessary to internalize experience and build the cognitive structures and sequences Piaget set forth. He did not agree with Piaget regarding the invariant nature of the progression of

stages. Rather, he stressed mediation as the necessary factor for some children. Not all would be successful in learning from direct experience.

Feuerstein captured the attention of the psychological, educational, and special education communities in the United States, and his observational methods are valuable because they do not involve standardized testing, and they do train teachers to analyze behaviors and focus on the mediation process–the interaction between teacher and student. Educators in the learning disability field do not dwell on the social-cultural explanation Feuerstein underscored but they do provide increased mediation as an implicit foundation in their model of assistance.

The Learning Disability Field after 25 Years

A great deal of progress has been made. Tests have improved. Theoretical assumptions are clearer. There is acceptance of a variety of causes for the uneven development of skills that characterizes the group. Motor and perceptual process training has been relegated to a less important role in instruction, and instruction is now provided directly in the subject matter that is presenting difficulties to the student. In addition, the emphasis on not only perceptual but cognitive function as the basis of the difficulties has led to a different tack in tying neurological function to learning disabilities. Many theorists are looking at perception and cognition in relation to brain function, which may ultimately offer assistance not available at the present time. The most important change has been the broader view of learning disabilities, their causes, and treatments. Now, the mainstreaming movement, along with the emphasis on "literacy" in schools, which means an emphasis on reading for enjoyment and information, is promising. This is paralleled by the whole language adherents who want the teaching of reading totally changed to reflect new theoretical translation of psycholinguistic principles of how language is learned. It's an exciting time.

A Period of Transition

Some ideas and practices are in transition. Providing instruction outside the regular classroom is being questioned as appropriate for many members of the LD population who have mild differences in skill development. Many districts are attempting to develop support services to allow more students to remain in the "mainstream," thereby avoiding the stigma and frequent loss of self-esteem, even

depression, which can accompany assistance given in the resource room and special day classes. It is not suggested that these classes be eliminated because there are many youngsters for whom they are appropriate and beneficial. However, the more options available, the more chances there are of developing programs to meet individual needs. The curriculum itself is being challenged. Many of the leaders in the field acknowledge the inadequacy of instructional practices. They are looking at how all children learn and realizing that learning cannot be entirely managed from the outside as is almost always the case in special education.

Ongoing Needs for Change

Assistance given without validation can cause depressed feelings and produce questionable achievement results as well.

The total thrust of support given to the learning disabilities population has been to focus on the child's deficits. These children, by definition, are *able*. There must be a shift in the focus to plan for validation of the strengths, talents, and abilities. Presently that is interpreted to mean strong learning modalities. The whole field needs to think of changes that will emphasize the ability of this group of students. It will be difficult to accomplish because the emphasis on deficit is so entrenched in our thinking. The change must come in validating oral language skills if they happen to be a strength, or visual motor skills if they happen to be strengths, but also to look at social skills, talents, interests, and any ability the child may have. It is truly distressing to consider that assistance given without validation can cause such depressed feelings and produce such questionable achievement results as well.

Substituting compensatory techniques to promote cognitive development rather than spending so much instructional time at the lowest level of skill teaching is an absolute must. The use of compensatory techniques needs to be encouraged so that development of LD youngsters is not stunted by the dull and boring repetitive assistance that is traditionally provided.

The direct teaching approach is indeed an improvement over the modality processing thrust, but another issue needs to be addressed. That issue involves consideration of the elements of a good education for any child. That is not discussed in most IEP's because special assistance traditionally has meant drill and practice in deficit areas and because a pervasive assumption exists that if students test in the able range, no attention need be given to stimulating the abilities. It is assumed these abilities are "fixed" and need no opportunities to develop. However, in the education of the gifted, the exact opposite holds. Direct experience, stimulation, enrichment, choice, exploitation of interests make up the foundation of their special programs.

A Critic of the Learning Disabilities Field

A psychiatrist, Gerald Coles, working at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School at Rutgers, has written a book that is a stinging attack on the learning disability field. He believes that cognitive development is based on interaction theory. It fits in with Feuerstein's, Piaget's, and Skinner's ideas His theory is specific in that it is working toward a general psychological theory of relationships and interactions between the individual and the social conditions in which development occurs.

He regards learning disabilities as a middle class phenomenon and states that the problems are not "in the inadequacy of the brain of the child," but in the quality of the interactions that have occurred. He places the blame for the children's behaviors on the social, economic, cultural, and psychological forces operating on this group of children and their families. He isn't particularly placing the blame on parents. He is indicting the negative factors in our society that impinge upon all of us and shape our behavior. He is attempting to change our view of where the inadequacy lies. Social interactions rooted in cultural beliefs, factors, and practices, not just deficits in the child, are where he suggests the inadequacy be placed. His book has generated a great deal of discussion in the field but it will take a longer time for the concept of inadequacy in the child to be dethroned from its firmly rooted position in the beliefs in the LD field.

Issues of a "Good" Education

The elements of a good education involve both direct teaching and/or compensatory education based on test information and direct observation. It also involves consideration of:

- Eliminating stigma in special assistance
- Validating and exercising the student's strengths and interests and ability to learn
- Providing an activity base to learning (as opposed to total paper and pencil tasks, workbooks, spiritmaster sheets, "in seat" learning)
- Balancing curriculum time between direct instruction and integrated learning (strong, stimulating social studies, science, math, and arts programs that lend themselves to active learning and "total process"experience)
- Emphasizing communicating rather than discrete skills in language learning
- Presenting natural teaching in both oral and written language

- Developing problem-solving skills and experimentation (as opposed to too much drill and practice)
- Fostering independence (If "structure" means teacher control of students, this will not occur. Structure can also mean a carefully planned curriculum with the elements of a "good" education built in.)
- Providing variety in content and method
- Increasing mediation or teaching at the moment of error, with positive teacher response and redirection
- Providing enough time for learning to be based on personal interest
- Allowing for exploration and choice
- Developing appreciation of the arts
- Encouraging creativity
- Involving group planning and shared experience
- Facilitating student and group self-direction and evaluation
- Adapting for critical skills the student has not yet developed
- Eliminating labeling or isolating students or describing them as inadequate or disabled

We accept an *active* education approach for those students who are already very able. But if one reviews the theorists - Montessori, Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Feuerstein, Coles, and others - who have been interested in how students learn, one finds they are in agreement that these processes are necessary for learning for all children. Some children have these processes operating in their preschool years, and when they come to school, they are "ready." For those children who are not ready, it is critical that the school provide as many of the missing experiences that underlie readiness skills as possible and help students respond to them. A lack of consideration of the factors that contribute to a good education may be one reason that special education intervention has not been more successful. But it is also possible to think of allowing some students to choose an entirely different route. The movement to "restructure" education is considering this option. Let's hope, however, that direct instruction will not be entirely abandoned as the restructuring takes place.

Dialectical Process Approach

Too often professionals approach curriculum decisions from too singular an approach.The solution isn't just modality processing or just direct instruction or including issues of a "good" education. Teacher training must be dialectical, allowing teachers to understand and to practice unifying opposite approaches. Teacher skill should

reduce the reliance on "teacher proof" materials. Learning can be an adventure with teacher as companion and guide. Children come into the world eager to learn. In the LD population this has too often been snuffed out. Issues involving out-of-context skill testing, meaning and phonics teaching, perceptual or process training, direct teaching, holistic education, and special education need not preclude each other.

Parent Involvement

Parents cannot abdicate their partnership role in the education of their children. They can take an active role in making some of the necessary changes. They can stay in close touch with their child's teacher and monitor progress. Parents also need to be aware of some of the issues in programs that affect their child's learning and be knowledgeable about what to observe and when to ask for change. It would be valuable for parents to read opposing points of view so that they can wend their way through the intricacies involved in the education of LD students. If they depend entirely on the opinions of "experts," they may be embracing a limited point of view and occasionally some inaccurate information.

Parents need to become more knowledgeable and more sophisticated about widely held beliefs about "ability." They need to know what is actually measured by ability tests, what special education responds to, and its effect on their child's learning. In special education, the concept of "ability" is described by what is measured on intelligence and other ability tests. The use of those test scores is often part of the problem for the LD student.

Parents can also work to develop the mainstream option so that regular classroom teachers learn something about differences in students. Most regular classroom teachers would be willing to learn and to try if enough support were provided. Regular teachers, whose training is primarily based on how to teach average students with fairly evenly developed skills, would benefit from in-service on how to help the "different" students.

Some Conclusions

All the in-service in the world will not be enough to allow success in the mainstream unless there is sufficient adult mediation.

All the in-service in the world will not be enough to allow success in the mainstream unless there is sufficient adult mediation. If interaction theories are correct, there will need to be enough individual instruction in the regular classroom to carry out a program that is not lip service but will actually assist students either to develop the skills they do not have or to compensate for them so that they can develop self-esteem and can learn and perform more enjoyably and efficiently.

It certainly is possible to consider training teams of teachers to group and re-group their classes to teach various skills in all students so that no one need feel inadequate because he has different instructional needs. Almost all students would benefit. The able would be more able; the average student could be more able; and the unevenly developed student could be more able, could have more evenly developed skills or could compensate for them. All students would have better self-esteem, and fewer of them would be likely to drop out of the learning process or school or both.

34

Chapter 1

Parents – Agents of Change

Parents need time to be involved in their children's daily lives, help them with their homework, know their friends, and answer their questions.

— California Joint Select Task Force on the Changing Family

The field of learning disabilities has many uncertainties in it that need to be recognized and accepted. We do not yet know all that needs to be known about how we learn in order to develop abilities. In addition, definitions of what constitutes a learning disability are not clear. Many of the tests used are not valid because they measure skills out of the context in which they are used. Labels stigmatize the children as do many of the programs. Drill and practice, modality process training or direct teaching as total curriculum frequently do not remediate the difficulties. The uncertainties may lessen as the field matures and more experience in teaching this group of children accrues.

One of the most pressing responsibilities of parents of learning disabled and low-achieving students is that they become knowledgeable guides, monitors, and advocates for their children's school experience.

One of the most pressing responsibilities of parents of learning disabled and low-achieving students is that they become knowledgeable guides, monitors, and advocates for their children's school experience. No one else is in such an advantageous position to act as shepherd to a child's total educational process. Parents are in a situation where they can provide balance, bringing greater consistency to what occurs at home and at school. They have the opportunity to make changes in both settings that will foster success.

In order to assume this role effectively, parents need to actively seek information about the characteristics of learning disabilities, about appropriate curriculum and placement options, and to look carefully at controversial issues. Within special education, the learning disability field in particular is the educational arena in which voluminous information is available about the differences in students that may preclude success in school. There are also many questions about some of the basic assumptions on which the learning disability field presently rests.

Parents and children evolve in tandem, supporting and challenging each other to develop ever more complete ways of knowing as they play out their lives together.

— Mary Field Belenky et al.

Parents will be able to carry out their advocate roles more effectively if they become well informed about the different, sometimes opposing, views held by the experts. Parents need information about instructional approaches, placement options, and behavior. With enough background, they will be able to form judgments based on their own child's particular needs and school experiences. A parent

need not be just a gullible recipient of a "hard sell" by professionals who may suggest the "perfect" method, the "perfect" material, or the "perfect" placement for the sake of expediency or for their own unique reasons.

Most professionals are careful about suggestions they make or "prescriptions" they write. However, sometimes their suggestions are made simply on the basis of availability of programs and placement. Perfect solutions do not exist, but informed choices among available options can be more wisely made by a knowledgeable parent who has learned to tolerate the uncertainties and disagreements in the LD field. Informed parents monitor learning not by popular methods or available placement, but by the comfort level of their children in their school experience.

Learning disabilities as a field is concerned with *differences* in children. Some of the differences are not totally modifiable; sometimes we can change the characteristics in the students through remediation; sometimes we need to compensate for them; sometimes the changes need to be made in the home environment or in the school, or in parent or teacher behavior. However, some improvement in student performance is always possible.

We have the power to change enough school demands to make children comfortable and to maintain their self-esteem.

We cannot "cure" these differences because they are not a disease, but we have the power to change enough school demands to make children comfortable and to maintain their self-esteem. This is the underlying philosophy and basis of all special education programs. This positive outlook about learning is the basic tenet of the learning disability movement, and probably there are greater expectations for this group because they are *able* in so many ways. The fact that programs sometimes fail to produce results does not change the truth of the basic belief – i.e., the children are able and can learn. However, we all need to learn more about what works and for whom.

Uncertainties and Options

Many factors require modification for children with unevenly developed skills. There are differences in suitable placement; in the training and philosophy of professionals; in alternatives, strategies, and remedial and compensatory techniques. This is a field in which there are many elements, and parents will usually find limited placement options for their child's education. This is true even when economics

are not an impossible hurdle. Actually more options exist in curriculum modifications than in placement changes. The more knowledgeable a parent becomes, the easier it will be to choose between the options available in both curriculum and placement and to help create situations for their own children or for the children to come in which success will be a more certain possibility.

Often changes can be made in curriculum so that the child's educational setting need not be changed, especially if the evaluation component in the educational plan is designed so that monitoring occurs frequently enough to provide timely information on progress. It is easy to lay out a plan at the beginning of the year and be unaware that it is not producing positive changes in achievement or satisfaction for the child until end of the year testing occurs. This situation can be avoided, and parents can secure information about progress by knowing what questions to ask and when to ask them.

If parents are to contribute to an effective educational program, it is essential that they become comfortable with the uncertainties that exist in determining the exact cause and the exact solution for learning problems. Sometimes several methods will need to be explored before the right one is discovered. Learning is a complex process. Many factors affect it. Our tests and observational instruments are far from perfect, and they do not always give us the exact information needed. Weighing the pro's and con's and selecting the "best" option, not the "perfect" solution, is what one must often settle for.

The more the parent learns about the uncertainties and the options, the better the chances for a child's achievement. Also, thus forewarned, parents will be less likely to be disappointed because their expectations will be based on realistic knowledge of the possibilities rather than on wishes. And it is undeniable that a parent's comfort or discomfort with the school and program can be communicated to a child. The impact of this important aspect of achievement should not be underestimated.

Sometimes, faced with opposing views, parents will feel confused and find it difficult to choose between available options. That is partly because they have insufficient information. The more they read and the more parents and professionals they talk to, the easier the choices become.

Resources

When faced with conflicting opinions from the authorities, parents will need to gather more information in order to develop their own opinion about a given issue.

Most county offices of education have an education library that has been set up for the professional educational staff. It is open and available to parents. The librarians are aware of research summaries that cover relevant topics in the field of learning disabilities and are there to help. When faced with conflicting opinions from authorities, parents will need to gather more information in order to develop their own opinion about a given issue. It takes an investment of time.

Many books and articles have been written about the characteristics of children with learning disabilities and about the tests used to identify them as well as explanations of the vocabulary and concepts used in the field. There are countless resources that describe appropriate instruction and discuss curriculum issues. There are also descriptions of programs and their differences, merits, and inadequacies. There is lots to learn, but the many available sources will assist parents in their advocacy role.

Parent-teacher conferences offer the vehicle for creating a sense of satisfaction with the school program for teacher, parents, and child. Parents will be able to participate as equals if they reach out for information and arrive at the conference with knowledge about the field gained on their own. This knowledge will also provide a base for questioning, discussing, or clarifying the rationale for the curriculum or placement interventions suggested by the school. Parents have a right to ask questions, and this should not create a conflict.

The Initial Quandary

Parents of children categorized as learning disabled often find themselves in a quandary when they participate in a school conference. Even though they may have read widely, they often come to the conference feeling inadequate and uncertain about their knowledge, for theirs may be "book learning" until they begin the interactions with the professionals assisting their child. They need to be assured that it takes a long time even for professionals to understand the bits and pieces of information about how a child's learning behavior as observed in tests adds up to what instruction should be offered.

Most professionals have had extensive formal training and have observed differences in many of their students. They are comfortable with the knowledge that no two children who have undeveloped skills are the same. Not so with parents who immediately feel at a

disadvantage when informed that their child has a learning disability. Unlike the professionals with whom they must deal, parents usually have had no experience with the concepts that seem mysterious and unbelievable and threatening. To a parent, a diagnosis of a learning disability may register as a personal inadequacy and can be very painful.

It is overwhelming for parents to sit in on a conference in which test information is given that they do not understand. Not only is the information gained from testing (often reported as difficulties in ability processing, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic skills) strange to parents, but information presented to them can be further confusing when terms like "discrimination," "sequencing," and "memory problems" are used. On first exposure it sounds like a foreign language or gobble-de-gook!

Initial Impact

Once a negative label is applied, it is difficult for parents to remember that this child is basically able, not unable.

When parents are first informed that they have a child with a learning disability, they may be truly distraught. To many uninformed people, learning disability is misconstrued as a term for mild mental retardation. The information is usually presented with emphasis on the child's inadequacy. The connotation is that of a deficit in the child, even when strengths are presented. The information is usually presented as something the child "has," like an illness. The description generally stated is, "Your child has a learning disability" or – heaven forbid! – "many learning disabilities." Strengths of the child are not stated or implied in the label, only later in the explanation or perhaps not at all. Once the negative label is applied, it is difficult for parents to remember that this child is basically able, not unable.

Guilt

To add to their dilemma, parents frequently feel guilty. They may immediately ask, "What did I do to cause this?" if not out loud, then to themselves. The format of the IEP meeting sometimes adds to their difficulties since it isn't a structure and a process with which parents are familiar. Their participation is somewhat that of an outsider, for most of them were not included in the design of the IEP and do not understand the concepts involved. They may continue to feel extraneous, outside the process, even though they are assured their opinions are valued. They frequently don't know enough even to venture an opinion. Sometimes they are encouraged to leave the decisions to the professionals. That is fine as long as the child makes sufficient progress. But parents should not count entirely on what others know. They need to learn to assess the issues themselves.

Anger

Initially, parents often know only that they do not know how to react and that they must do something to help their child. Sometimes anger surges and is directed at the school, at the child, and at anyone else who is handy. It may take a while for this anger to dissipate and to be replaced by emotions that are more constructive.

Inferiority

Sometimes, especially when the term learning disability is first applied to their child, parents may have feelings of personal inadequacy, defensiveness, and, worst of all, inferiority. At this stage they may be too uncertain to voice either their questions or their doubts. And sometimes all that is asked of them in an IEP meeting is acquiescence to the plans made by the professionals. In fact, sometimes the subtleties of the conference – the tone of voice, the concurrence of a whole "army" of professionals sitting at the table, the assurance with which opinions are delivered, the "trust us, we know" attitude – precludes the questions that may be welling up within parents. Their uneasy feelings often stay with them, for they not only don't know *what* to ask or *where* to turn for clarification, but because of the tone of the conference, they don't feel free to ask.

The professionals who are offering explanations and suggestions frequently do not simplify the terminology sufficiently. Sometimes an explanation is offered, but the parent just hasn't enough background to attach the information to anything meaningful. Sometimes a school plan is based on available services in an expedient effort to provide some instruction for a needy child; yet the plan doesn't "feel" right to the parent. The proposed solution can be helpful or not, depending on its match to the child's needs, the child's acceptance of the assistance, and the environment in which it is presented. But initially the parent has little or no way of evaluating the proposed solution, and so the quandary persists.

The Parent's Role

Parents are well within their rights to ask for a program that provides the child with some satisfaction.

Parents can judge, if they are knowledgeable enough, the possible effectiveness of what is suggested, and in the process of broadening their knowledge become aware of other possibilities that may not have been presented. They can learn to judge the quality of instruction, whether it has enough breadth and depth or specificity to generate sufficient changes in achievement, and what the effect on self-esteem may be. They need to be watchful of their child's feelings about his participation in program changes. Parents usually know how their children feel about school. They are well within their rights

to ask for a program that provides the child with some satisfaction. When a child is actively unhappy, they may need to consider their own role in the parent, child, teacher triangle. While the parent may not have caused the difficulties, it is possible for them to exacerbate the problem by overreacting, by being "too involved." There must be some objectivity; otherwise the child may retreat or act out. Parents can learn to be open with the school staff and diplomatic in discussing concerns so that the staff remains receptive, and plans for change can be made.

Fortunately, most parents are not called on to embark on this educational adventure, as only approximately 10–15 percent (perhaps stretching the category, 20 percent) of the population is estimated to be learning disabled. The number could be higher because those allowed to be identified must fit a formula that is designed to differentiate according to a fixed discrepancy between "ability" and achievement. If we include the low-achieving population, which is also entirely justified in asking for stimulating programs, 50 percent of the population would be included.

Prediction

There is no way to accurately pre-determine who is going to have difficulty with written language and arithmetic, the main academic tasks of the primary school years. Most experienced teachers can make good guesses in kindergarten about who needs to be watched as they observe the number of deficient areas and the severity of the lags in crucial development. Even the guesses of experienced teachers are not always accurate because there are such different rates of development in those skills that underlie school success – skills that involve social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development.

If teachers cannot always predict, it is safe to assume that most parents cannot forecast learning problems. And it should be mentioned that some children who might seem "at risk" in kindergarten are doing just fine in second grade, especially if they have had supportive, enriched teaching at home and in school. For parents, the teaching role should be one of ongoing watchfulness and assistance with difficult developmental tasks.

Early Intervention

Testing at early ages may predispose professionals to see a child as inadequate when it is his developmental rate that is really the culprit.

Early intervention can make great differences in a child's motivation and persistence in trying to learn. Children frequently drop out of the learning process when they compare themselves to others and say to themselves, "They can learn, and I can't. There is something wrong with me. I'm dumb. I might as well stop trying." Such thinking may be going on while professionals are waiting for skills to develop without any awareness of the child's depressed thoughts. On the other

hand, testing at early ages may predispose professionals to see a child as inadequate when it is his *developmental rate* that is really the culprit. That is why supportive and encouraging teachers who have the power to modify school demands are so important in the early years.

Sometimes the wisest decision is simply to delay instruction, especially with written language, reading, and spelling, if that is possible. Often there are combined classes or "developmental" classes that allow other options. At the present time flexibility is not one of the outstanding characteristics of mass education, but parents can try to advocate for it as much as possible. There is always some leeway.

No one should fail kindergarten but this can happen if too much emphasis is placed on academics. Some schools consider the primary years as a developmental continuum and group students accordingly. Sometimes tutoring and various therapies are appropriate, especially in language development. There isn't any easy answer to the problem of the child who isn't "ready." Discussions between parent and school staff should be directed toward choosing the best option.

Retention

Retention is also a possibility but can be fraught with the danger of causing depressed self-esteem even in a compliant child who cannot or does not vent feelings. Schools propose this as a solution when they feel it will prevent the child from facing the more complex demands of the next grade or that review of the material will be helpful. Research does not support the efficacy of this option (Shepard and Smith, 1990).

Determining which tack to take should be made by those who are well acquainted with the child and who thoughtfully consider options. Parents have the final say and will have some inkling about how their child (even a kindergartner) may feel about retention. Parents also need to know what studies show about the factors that should be considered when contemplating retention and its consequences.

If the decision is made to retain the child, placement in a different school can ameliorate some of the negative effect. Another possibility is choosing a school that does not retain children, if one is available, that is financially feasible for the family.

Expedient Intervention

Many schools have a policy of waiting until the child fails for two years before testing or providing assistance. That can mean waiting for help until third grade even though the child was identified as being "at risk" in kindergarten or even in preschool programs and may have had difficulty in first grade. Testing is not always delayed because the school is withholding services. It can occur because of a belief in the variation of developmental growth rates in children. The waiting is for readiness to develop on its own and is based on the idea that "development" is a predetermined process, is "wired in," and given enough time, the needed skills will appear. Or it may be that the professionals in the school do not have faith in the power of the tests to accurately pre-determine who may fail and fear that they may falsely identify students whose school performance is inadequate. That does happen. The thoughtful consideration of all of these issues allows for appropriate interventions.

Delay only increases the difficulties because the self-esteem of the child can be so negatively affected.

Many educators feel that waiting isn't the only option. Montessori is a good example of an educator who did not believe in waiting. In many cases, delay only increases the difficulties because the self-esteem of the child can be so negatively affected. Head Start programs attest to the success of enriched programs for young children. Parents would do well to provide assistance as soon as difficulties are encountered rather than to wait for the school testing. It is quite possible to begin teaching children with mild differences without testing. Often the kindergarten has a curriculum guide, and with the teacher's help and direction, this guide can be used in home intervention.

Home Teaching

Most parents have not had an opportunity to participate in pre-parenting educational programs and are not aware of the teaching role they performed in the preschool years. Children differ greatly in their need for direct instruction or mediation. This means that they need someone to watch them to see what they understand or don't understand; someone who is willing to explain again, and sometimes again, and to determine and validate their efforts even if they are not completely successful, to do this until the youngsters do understand and do experience satisfaction.

Parents can be enormously helpful by encouraging children to talk about events in their lives, by reading to them, by providing lots of interactive language experience (listening to the children as well as talking to them). Parents can provide appropriate toys, materials, equipment, a rich environment, and abundant social experiences. Parents can re-teach school curriculum if their children are having difficulty with school-related tasks. Rewarding curiosity, reinforcing

independence, and helping children deal with frustrations are valuable familial processes that can start early.

Even in families with the best of parenting skills, there are children who do not learn from direct experience, but do very well when someone is patient, analyzes the task, and says something like, "That was a good try. You balanced on the bike just right. You just had trouble getting off. Watch me. This is how it is done. Watch where I put my left foot. I take it off the pedal and put it on the ground. Then I will watch you and help if you have any trouble." It isn't suggested that children be "pushed," only that knowledgeable and sensitive early intervention can be of great value.

In the example of the bike, the parent didn't wait for the child to "develop" the skill but (1) praised effort, naming the good approximation; (2) modeled the desired behavior; (3) was specific about the critical element so that the child knew what to focus on; (4) expressed confidence in the child's ability and encouraged the child to continue to try; and (5) offered to "be there" to assist if the child had some doubts about success.

Knowledge – A Dependable Base

When parents have read widely, have listened to many discussions, and have understood and accepted the possibility of differences of opinion, they will be laying a foundation that will allow them to be more comfortable in making choices and participating in designing the curriculum for their child. Parents must come to understand that their contributions in establishing and evaluating the curriculum is one of their main tasks. It can't be left entirely to educators. They don't spend enough time with the child. Parents do.

To add to the general fund of information parents need, the structure and process in a parent-teacher conference will be fully described in subsequent chapters. It will take *using* this structure and process in a few conferences before parents feel they have some control or at least the beginning feelings of equality in the parent-teacher interaction. Experience will not substitute for reading and becoming knowledgeable about the issues, but it will provide a supportive base – a clearly marked path while the parent continues to study and learn.

44

A detailed description of structure and process will be offered in later chapters to fill in gaps, to generate positive outcomes in curriculum design and achievement, and to distract parents from their initial uncertainties and preoccupation with labels, definitions, discrete concepts, and incomprehensible issues.

Psychological Characteristics

Not only is there a great deal of information that parents must gather, but they must also learn to accept the fact that while improvements in achievement can be effected, it may not be possible to "cure" the child. Many of the factors that affect learning are observable at birth. It is a moot point whether they are genetic or developed during the neo-natal period. These "psychological characteristics" (attention patterns, impulsivity, activity level, mood, irritability, dependence, independence, passive or active learning style, tactile defensiveness, motivation, and persistence) can have a profound impact on learning. All of them are modifiable, at least to some degree, but education does not usually address them directly. While they are always modifiable, they may not disappear completely as interferences to learning no matter how much instruction is provided and may require the development of compensatory behavior and personal motivation in the child. Again, as the field develops, this may change, and education may be able to accomplish many feats that are not now possible.

The way teaching is planned and the way in which children learn are different.

Education is a "logical" affair with curriculum areas usually designed around a task analysis of reading, math, or other subject matter, often arranged in a linear fashion from discrete, simple skills to complexity. There is not an exact "match" between the psychological characteristics in the student that affect learning and the logical structure in curriculum. The way teaching is planned and the way in which children learn are different. Sometimes some of these factors are considered in the design of a material or a process, but for the most part these characteristics vary greatly from child to child, and curriculums are largely planned for "average" children whose skills are fairly evenly developed. Certainly our children would better off if a "process of learning" approach was included in the curriculum design. But even with that addition, the psychological differences in students wouldn't entirely disappear.

The highly developed child (gifted) and the able, unevenly developed child (learning disabled) for the most part are not well served when their fund of knowledge, reasoning skills, and perceptual preferences

are tested, but their psychological characteristics are not. This is because there are few tests available that measure these characteristics. They may be observed by the evaluator, but evaluators differ in how much weight they place on the effect on learning of these behaviors. They are frequently mentioned in the testing report but infrequently included in the IEP.

While attention behavior has recently received a great deal of attention, the other psychological characteristics await their turn to be discovered and labeled as "deficit disorders." The psycho-educational evaluation that occurs before a child is designated and stamped officially as learning disabled or gifted or one of the other special needs categories is imperfect, and it will take some time to develop better tests as tools or even, in context, better observational evaluation procedures. The school program, the teachers, and the parents own some of the "deficit" if they are interacting with the child. It certainly would be healthier for the child if all of the inadequacy weren't viewed as his.

Limits, Uses, and Abuses of Test Results

Evaluation of students' processing skills are typically made through tasks in tests unrelated to their actual classroom work. They are frequently not observed in oral and written classroom tasks to determine if they perform better when the content is more meaningful. The information is clearly there in the student's errors, but most often is not used by teachers. Teachers may note that a student doesn't remember particular classes of items (words, numbers, or forms) or has difficulty with order or relationships, but frequently there isn't time to note the errors in order to modify the teaching plan or to use a different strategy or to make the correction at the moment of error.

If they are honest, even professionals will admit it is difficult to extrapolate "out of context" test information to instructional content.

If they are honest, even professionals will admit it is difficult to extrapolate "out of context" test information to instructional content. (Parents may find that honesty gratifying.) And many experienced teachers read the test reports, establish "ball park" diagnostic impressions, and file the reports. They stick to task analysis of the curriculum as their guide, watching to see what works, modifying their favorite teaching materials as they go, and responding to the psychological characteristics in the children in a haphazard manner. This can result in either a very efficient practice or a meager instructional plan, depending on (1) the philosophical base about teaching the teacher embraces; (2) the diversity of the teaching repertoire available; (3) the

46

ability to relate to students; (4) the composition of the group; and a host of other subtleties in the teaching-learning process usually given no consideration in educational planning.

When most professionals, for example, discuss attention behavior, they dismiss the issue of boredom with the curriculum in favor of a deficient process in the child. At the very least, boredom should be evaluated as a possible factor. School for most children is boring, but they perform. For the learning disabled, the boredom has a more pernicious effect as it aggravates the difficulty in performance.

Parents as Teachers, Monitors, and Agents of Change

If an able child displays some unevenly developed skills, a parent needs to be watchful of progress or lack of it. While it would be enormously helpful to be knowledgeable about school curriculum and able to help with homework in an informed manner, that is not always possible in modern families. There may be only one parent. Even when there are two, they may work long hours and are exhausted in the evening when homework is generally completed. The most constant, important, and always possible role of parents is that of monitor of progress.

Parents were responsible for providing the impetus in developing the field of learning disabilities and differentiating this group from the retarded, the unmotivated, and the disturbed. There is no doubt that parents can also become knowledgeable and continue to be effective in generating the changes still needed to perfect educational options for this group of "able" students who are "disabled" because some of the necessary skills are undeveloped. Parents need to ask for and be willing to accept a partnership role in the education of their children, to ask for remediation and compensation in a manner that protects their children's self-esteem and provides a possibility for improved achievement. In other words, they need to take the time to be involved.

Teaching youngsters to monitor their own attention and become aware of their own memory behavior and what is helpful to them (visualization, mnemonics, association, self-talk, reduction in amount, extension in time, etc.) can be of great benefit. Teachers and parents

can work together to see that the student's ideas and suggestions are incorporated into any new plan.

A structure and a process for such conferences are fully described in Chapters 2 and 3. The material has been developed from the parent's point of view with the aim of generating positive outcomes in curriculum design and achievement. It also provides a positive vehicle to rely on to provide equilibrium during the initial period of uncertainly and preoccupation about labels, definitions, and incomprehensible issues. The parent-teacher conference is a powerful means of effecting positive changes.

Chapter 2

The Structure for Parent-Teacher Conferences

Teachers affect eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops.

— Henry Adams

In spite of all the uncertainties and questions about the philosophical basis of the learning disabilities field, using a structure and a process as a guide for home-school discussions will provide parents with a framework for participation in this important meeting and may serve to refresh the memories of the professionals who are working with the parent in planning a remedial program.

THE STRUCTURE

The three areas that need to be discussed about each child at each conference are:

1. Social and emotional behavior

(Adult relationships, friendships, and feelings)

2. Physical behavior

(Gross and fine motor skills, visual and auditory acuity, health, nutrition, etc..)

3. Academic behavior

(Validation of strengths, comprehensive plans for a good education as well as one that requires special consideration)

NOTE: The *process* will be outlined and discussed in Chapter 3.

Social and Emotional Behavior

Just as much planning time should be allotted to social-emotional issues as to academics.

When children feel competent and able, they learn more easily. If they turn away from learning, they need to be re-directed. This may be done by reassuring them of their worth or their ability to learn or perhaps by making other perceptible changes in curriculum content, activities, methods, materials, explanations or placements that will facilitate learning. Visible progress charts are helpful when children don't recognize their own gains, and adults' words are not believed. Youngsters need to know that progress is being made.

It is important that social and emotional issues not be dealt with only by specialists outside of the school. The home and the school can cooperate in developing some plans even if outsiders also need to be involved. School is a big part of a student's day, and mental and social hygiene need to prevail. Home is equally important. As much as possible parent and teacher, those most directly involved with the child, need to discuss and agree on the approach to be taken when these issues are areas of concern. It is helpful to have consistency in expectation, limits, consequences, and reinforcements.

Positive/Negative Messages

Teachers frequently give grades that are negative because they are based on what was not done in an assignment or what was not correct. When a grade is given for what was done correctly, the student's self-esteem can be protected and motivation maintained. For instance, in a 20-word spelling test, a child may get 10 correct, and the teacher will write a comment indicating the score is not good enough or may simply write a 10 with a check mark. Sometimes the mark may be an F. Sometimes it is a minus. The student has been graded on what was missing, not given credit for what was done or help on how to improve. It would be of greater assistance if the grade and remark were, "Good, you got 10. Let's try for 12 next week. See me and I'll give you some suggestions on how to study so you will remember the whole list." A parent can always request that grading procedures be changed. Curriculum and placement deliver messages about ability that children receive clearly. Improvements in skills also convey messages that students always receive eagerly and that act as a motivational spur.

Signals at Home and in the Classroom

In a regular classroom setting, defining needs and problems is relatively easy. They present themselves clearly in the social arena when a student doesn't get along with his peers. In the emotional area, they may be noticeable if a student is overtly unhappy. Sometimes a parent will hear one story from the child and a different one from

the teacher. That difference should immediately signal a need for discussion. Children should not spend a whole year in a situation in which they feel they are disliked, misunderstood, or cannot cope with demands. Some children will have physical symptoms – headaches, stomach aches, difficulty with sleep – or they may become withdrawn or aggressive. For compliant, obedient children who keep their feelings hidden or deny them, there are tests that can give parents and teachers some idea of what a child may be enduring. Counseling sessions may provide additional information and insight.

When a student becomes combative physically or abusive with language, parent and teacher need to confer and develop ways of helping him. The curriculum is a powerful tool and can elicit negative or positive behaviors, depending on how flexible the staff can be and how willing they are to understand the feelings of a student who cannot do what others seem to do so easily.

A child may be labeled "disturbed" when curriculum demands are inappropriate, and the disturbed behavior is actually proclaiming his inability to cope.

A child may be labeled "disturbed" when curriculum demands are inappropriate, and the disturbed behavior is actually proclaiming his inability to cope. Modifying curriculum can be difficult for some teachers but parents are always justified in asking for an open discussion.

Common Behavior Patterns

It isn't surprising to find that students who are inattentive disrupt their own learning. Or that students who withdraw or act out not only disrupt the class but also are disorganized in meeting demands at school or at home. They don't seem to hear or remember what they have been asked to do.

Difficulties with other children may cause fear or anger and distract the student from educational tasks. Or the child may fear the teacher and be unable to focus on explanations or ask for help. Children react differently to the same problem.

Perhaps the student is acutely aware of his failure to grasp the explanation but fears exposing his inadequacy before his classmates if he asks that the explanation be repeated. Sometimes students have physical conditions such as a cold or an allergy that distract them. Perhaps the drill and practice periods are consuming too much of the daily schedule, and the child has become passive, even resistant, and dawdles. Perhaps the child works slowly because of motor difficulties or processing style and cannot finish the work assignment in the time allotted. Few children take the inability to perform in school lightly.

Sometimes they cannot express their frustration and aren't even aware of what is the cause.

Inattentiveness, a common behavior in LD children, may be based on problems in the home – conflicts between parents, death, financial stress, illness; or it may be an inherited tendency; or boredom may overwhelm the natural desire to learn. For various reasons, persistence in learning may not have developed as a learning behavior. Frequently the parent is told of the child's inadequacies. Less frequently is the teaching plan described. When negative behavior is reported, parents have the right to ask, "Could we work together on a plan to help Joe ?" Parents are entitled to know what the school had done before they were informed about the behavior. They may need to ask for suggestions or they may need to be listened to as they make suggestions as their part in the plan. Some parents may feel they aren't equipped to suggest a change, and teachers may have the same feeling. But when they work together and ask, "What can we do to help John pay better attention?" an answer will be forthcoming. Referral for additional outside assistance is always in order, but *never instead* of a joint plan. Referral is not an adequate parent-school intervention by itself.

There isn't a single solution to inattention or other problems because not all inappropriate behavior springs from the same cause.

There isn't a single solution to inattention or other problems because not all inappropriate behavior springs from the same cause. Strategies frequently need to be considered from several vantage points. Changing the curriculum should be considered first. The curriculum embraces everything within the school walls: the teacher, the materials and strategies, the physical environment, and the school philosophy, which always exists even if it isn't stated.

Joint Behavior Management and Planning

Because there is such a prevalent belief in the learning disabilities field that the child's lack of appropriate behavior in school is like a disease, the expectation generated is that there is a medication or a method that will be a "quick fix" and the child will be cured. There usually are no magical potions. That should not be discouraging if those involved are determined to try to find a combination of strategies to be used by everyone to generate the necessary changes. Reassuring the child that change is possible is sometimes forgotten in the development of plans. This is an important ingredient because children can be discouraged when they feel they are not competent in school and are negatively viewed. Sometimes their inappropriate behavior insures that they get the attention from adults that is not forthcoming when they are passively attentive rather than actively inattentive.

52

Currently there is some evidence that an inattention problem may be related to depression, and anti-depressants may be useful. Monitoring the dosage and its effect becomes critical in successful use of medication. Parents are in the most advantageous position to assume the monitoring role because of their place between school and physician. Success requires that information from the teacher and parent be relayed to the physician regularly. Monitoring the diet may also be effective with some youngsters.

Too often the child's behavior is described to the parent as a physical disability, and they are then told to seek medication from a pediatrician or psychiatrist. Sometimes the non-medical professional will even indicate the exact drug. Medications can be helpful, but they should always be accompanied by the planning modifications indicated earlier. Current thinking about medication is that it is beneficial and often helps children focus and pay attention, but when it is discontinued, the old behavior patterns return (Hinshaw, 1991). That is why so much emphasis is placed on behavior management, family, and individual counseling.

Strategies

For any inappropriate behavior, selected strategies should be combined in a constellation according to the need. Use of a single strategy is usually insufficient. In addition, no matter what outside professional interventions are sought, a plan for assistance in classroom and home still needs to be made, implemented, and evaluated. It needs to be complementary and consistent and evaluated frequently so that changes can be made when results are unsatisfactory. Changes in behavior are not impossible but they usually require planning and evaluation over a varying period of time, depending on the individual and the behavior. Sometimes it takes much longer than one would expect. Sometimes parents or teachers will say, "I tried and it didn't work." Any behavioral intervention takes time and may require modifications, changes in incentive, or reinforcements. Parents and teachers can confer and make such changes in order to continue a management plan. Planned behavior management strategies always need to accompany other interventions.

Effecting change can't be left to therapy or medication alone.

In each parent-teacher conference, it is not enough just to describe the behavior. The questions that need to be posed are: "What can we do to assist this student?" and "How can we structure the situation so that the student can help him/herself?" Again, the curriculum is a powerful tool. Changes in it can make great changes in student behavior. When questions about curriculum changes are asked, the answer will be forthcoming if the joint pre-expectation is that the two

adults will make an attempt to formulate a plan, possibly including changes in the behavior of the parent and the teacher. If outside professional assistance is used, it means that there are three or more adults who are acting as advocates for the child, and additional possibilities become available for inclusion in the plan. Effecting change can't be left to therapy or medication alone.

Physical Behavior

When the learning disability field came into existence in the 1960's, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the physical basis of intellectual development. Many tests and programs were devised for measuring and improving performance in fine and gross motor skills, lateralization, and directionality. Claims were made that the programs, called sensory integration training, would directly affect and improve intelligence and achievement.

In the ensuing years, research has not borne out these claims for direct relationships between physical skill training and changes in cognitive or academic performance. As the field has evolved, theories and practices have changed, and earlier ideas of direct relationships have been modified and some abandoned.

There is still basic validity to the claim that physical behavior underlies cognitive (thinking and language) growth. (Thinking skills and their ramifications will be discussed in full in Chapter 4.) Certainly, we are all aware of the change in infancy from undifferentiated movement to very specific skills in touching, feeling, seeing, hearing, and smelling. These are all active processes that involve movement in the sensory processing and gross motor systems.

One of the most critical factors in a child's learning may be the degree of activity or reaching out for information present in the child.

As children grow, movement continues to be an important aspect of the intake of information about the environment and an essential aspect of human well-being. In fact, one of the most critical factors in a child's learning may be the degree of activity or reaching out for information present in the child. Passivity may be a hidden factor in the learning behavior of many members of the LD group. It may not mean a lack of motivation although that can always be a factor. It may simply be not understanding how to be an active listener or reader or problem solver. It may involve a notion in the child that information processing is automatic.

Sensory-Motor Training/Physical Education

It is valid to consider sensory-motor training programs for students with severe lags in gross or fine motor skill just to facilitate the development of the lacking skill and to promote general physical competence; transfer of this training to academic achievement should not be expected. There are surveys that teachers can use to screen students for gross and fine motor performance to assist in determining suitable interventions. Fine motor developmental lags or deficiencies often translate into serious problems in handwriting, so serious that they effectively preclude the writing performance that makes up such a large part of school demands. The sooner this is addressed in planning and instruction, the better for the child, even if the decision is to by pass writing instruction and use a compensatory strategy.

Everyone could benefit from the exercise that is systematically provided in sensory-motor integration programs. This training is usually provided by occupational therapists. However, it may be costly, and when cost is a factor, parents can consider other sports that involve movement of the whole body or specific body parts. For both students with severe lags and those with milder deficits, sports programs based on personal interests, such as swimming, dancing, running, tennis, soccer, basketball, and sports camps can be beneficial and fun. Sensory-motor integration programs and sports need not be mutually exclusive. Exercises can be added to the regular physical education program for developing skills of balance, directionality, and basic movements. Recently it has been suggested that remedial, (sometimes called "adaptive") physical education be part of the regular curriculum because so many of our students have poor motor skills. That suggestion is based on the belief that exercise is related to well-being and health, not cognitive development.

Parents can work with their school staff about the possibility of initiating these sensory-motor and physical education programs. These are ideal activities for parent volunteers. There are many guides in the LD literature for including this direct skill training as part of physical education routines.

At every parent-teacher conference the physical issues need review whenever problems are clearly visible or suspected. The physical area also includes visual and auditory acuity as well as illness (temporary and long term). Provisions need to be considered to cushion the effect of health on learning achievement.

Teachers can plan classroom interventions for fine motor skill development. Handwriting is a perfect vehicle for training fine motor

skills. It seems to have gone out of style to train children in "penmanship." As a visual-motor training program, it is ideal. It uses the symbols of language rather than geometric forms and is more meaningful. When it is used, decisions need to be made about how much time is to be spent in the training and whether a compensatory technique (computer, typewriter, tape recorder, or "secretary") might be more suitable. Such decisions are easily made by those who know the child and who embrace a flexible curriculum philosophy to allow for differences in students.

Allergies

Allergies make it difficult for students to attend and concentrate and need to be reviewed regularly as factors that may negatively affect achievement. It isn't unusual in a visit to a typical classroom to see a student sniffling, with streaming eyes, sneezing, scratching, breathing heavily or in other states of discomfort, indicating that insufficiently treated allergies are wreaking havoc. Physicians and other specialists should be consulted to determine need for treatment.

Nutrition

Nutrition is another factor that can have a negative effect on school performance. Just as movement is basic to well-being, nutrition has an important effect on learning for the same reason. Hunger is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. Well-balanced, ample breakfasts and lunches are items that should be on every parent/teacher conference agenda. Sometimes children bring appropriate food to school but don't eat it. They often trade for "desirable" items and end up with undesirable ones. Teachers are often aware of this and can cooperate with the parent in reducing these trades or at least making them more healthful.

In this age of fast and junk foods, which are so attractive to school-age children, parents and teachers need to pool their monitoring roles so that both home and school eating patterns do not go unheeded as factors that may influence achievement.

Although research in the area of diet control has not conclusively demonstrated that diets are effective in relation to improved academic achievement, many parents have reported remarkable differences as a result of eliminating certain additives and curtailing sugar. On an individual basis, regardless of what the research may reveal for groups, one might agree that if a parent thinks it helps, it does in individual cases. Research frequently ignores the group who benefited from a treatment because it was not large enough to be "statistically" significant.

56

Twenty five percent of students will benefit from any intervention.

It has been stated that twenty five percent of students will benefit from any intervention; Parents can use this statement to help in making the decision in favor of training when research demonstrates that it may not contribute to significant gains. Perhaps the attention the youngster receives in these interventions, the language, or the parent's efforts to assist make the difference, not the content of the treatment itself. Over and over parents describe changes or improvements that research does not support or hasn't noted.

Drugs and Sexual Activity

These are dramatic new issues that have been added to parent and school agendas. Parents need to acquaint themselves about drug availability and use and about sexual behavior among the peer group to which their student belongs. They need to learn to watch for signs that indicate drug use or sexual activity. Contact with school and community resources is essential in order to monitor behavior effectively. All school staffs are now vigilant, and programs are offered to help students understand the dangers and consequences of their choices. Parents would do well to seek out community programs that counsel them in their monitoring role. School counselors and psychologists are good referral sources if therapeutic interventions are required.

Academic Behavior

Each of the academic areas involving oral language (listening and speaking) and written language (reading, writing, spelling, social studies, science, math) may benefit from a discussion that delineates the differences between test performance and classroom performance. (Language in all of its important aspects will be fully developed in Chapter 5.) This is especially true when a child tests well but doesn't work well in class, doesn't finish homework, turn in assignments, or is unable to take notes or write reports. These are frequent characteristics of many unmotivated students and are more prevalent in the learning disabled group because underlying basic skills are not sufficiently developed to support the required performance. Sometimes students are described as "lazy" or "dependent" when they literally are not able to perform or it is so difficult for them to complete tasks, they lose the incentive to try.

Learning How to Learn

Very often students come to school not knowing how to learn in the way that schools require learning to proceed. If the teacher does not offer the structure or the steps in a particular process and make the student aware of this structure or these steps, many students will not

57

be aware that they are actually proceeding through a process and that there is a set of relationships they must discern and remember. The teacher may do an excellent job of structuring the lesson or using a book where the structure is very clear. Yet it is not at all unusual for students not to have identified the structure on their own or even to have noticed it unless it is deliberately pointed out to them, and they are pre-set to be able to re-state it or use it again.

The idea that the reader constructs the meaning in the selection based on personal pre-knowledge and experience puts a very different light on "comprehension."

For example, most students have not been made aware of the pragmatics of reading. Many teachers are not aware either. They think of reading as phonics instruction and comprehension. Reading is a means of social interaction. Many theorists are urging teachers to develop it in the same ways that oral language is learned through use for purposeful communication. Just thinking about reading from this frame of reference puts a different complexion on instruction. The idea that the reader constructs the meaning in the selection based on personal pre-knowledge and experience puts a very different light on "comprehension." The understanding of the text may be very different for different readers depending on background knowledge.

All students should be taught how to identify the "form" of the reading material they are using, what the purpose is, why the author wrote it, and for whom. They need to be able to pick up information from the form (book, magazine, newspaper); from the print type; from the divisions (chapters, bibliographies, appendix, charts). They should also be taught the relationship and differences in oral language and written language as communication forms.

Study Skills Programs

Many study skills programs are available for secondary education but are not regarded as so important in the elementary school. Exceptions may be the strategies that are taught for reading comprehension in the upper elementary grades.

Study skills can involve learning how to improve memory, listening, test-taking, managing time, note-taking, outlining, proofreading, self-monitoring and evaluation, generalizing the study skills taught, and translating the principles to different content areas.

It may appear that a student is dawdling and daydreaming. But this needs to be differentiated from a pattern of slow response time – or difficulties with writing because of motor problems – or both – which is not uncommon. The student isn't lazy; the task is truly more difficult for one who works slowly or has undeveloped motor skills.

While mastery of these study skills are helpful to all learners, they are particularly important for the learning disabled and low achievers, for it is just these issues that are described when the term "disorganization" is applied to them.

Student Responsibility

It is always appropriate to put responsibility on the student. The first thing to be determined is that the student knows what is expected. Even if the student doesn't listen effectively, which is a common problem for the LD group, there are plans that parent and teacher can make to minimize that road block. The student may need to be made aware of options available for understanding or seeking further explanation of assignments (asking the teacher or an assigned peer, tape recording them, having them pre-written). With that done, the parent may say to the child, "When your teacher lets me know that you are finishing your work (or turning in your work), we'll do something special together" or "You may choose to do something special." Let the student participate in the choice. "It is up to you to make your teacher aware that you are finishing. You can even tell the teacher to write or call me." During the parent-teacher conference, the teacher and the parent can set up a communication system for checking on finished work in school or homework or, even better, can provide the student with a system for self-reminder.

When disorganization is present, some counseling around the issue of taking responsibility for the behavior is always in order.

When disorganization is present, some counseling around the issue of taking responsibility for the behavior is always in order. While the parent and teacher should always make their expectations clear and as supportive as possible, the counseling can sometimes be more effective when it is provided by a professional not directly involved.

Student responsibility should also include the student's own assessment of how improvement may be made. When change is contemplated, it may be helpful to prepare the student for what is expected, rehearsing the desired behavior, and then letting him try the activity with guidance, validation, and refocusing.

Organizational Skills

Sometimes it is difficult to find tests for such skills as "organizational skills," which may be the primary area of deficit. Organizational skills – i.e., strategies or sets of steps or time management systems for some of the more complex demands in school that go beyond the basics – can be taught.

Not enough emphasis is placed on instruction in this important area. It is assumed that organizational skills come ready-made in students

or that if they are able, they ought to be able to figure them out for themselves or that the problem is one of laziness or lack of motivation. Even if the latter is true, some joint planning is in order. This is easier to accomplish with younger and middle grade students. Sometimes professionals involved with secondary students feel the consequences of inappropriate school behavior should be meted out equally to all with no accommodations or special considerations. However, when we work with underachieving students, the possibility of not knowing "how to learn" always needs to be considered.

Psychological Processes

Behaviors labeled as "disorganization" sometimes overlap into the previously mentioned psychological processes, such as attention, independence, impulsivity, motivation, perseverance and speed of performance, activity level, mood, tolerance for change, and active and passive learning stances. Occasionally, even a special education teacher will throw up her hands, feeling that the student "ought" to take responsibility for finishing assigned work or remembering to turn in homework. It's as if the teacher gets tired of trying. Indeed, students do sometimes try teacher and parental patience.

Nevertheless, our responsibility toward our children is to continue to try. Sometimes the appropriate route is to provide support and sometimes to put them on their own, but that cannot be determined ahead of time as standard procedure. These decisions need to be made on an individual basis but should always be supportive, never vindictive.

In the 1986 New York longitudinal study, which had parents observe and list characteristics present in their children at birth, the psychological characteristics mentioned above loomed large. In that study, observations were conducted for the presence of the characteristics every five years for 25 years. The study found that the characteristics continued to be present. However, that was an "observational" study. There was no attempt to "intervene" and change the behaviors. In some of the studies on these psychological issues in which interventions were carried out, the results are mixed.

Indeed, that is what one would expect in the LD population, which differs on a variety of dimensions as well as the skills related to the 3R's. One of the problems is that LD youngsters do not all differ in the same configuration of psychological behaviors. Yet these behaviors very well may be more important as the focus of an intervention than the language or math or perceptual skills that make up our usual focus Parents can ask that these psychological processes be

written into an IEP rather than just mentioned or considered as the domain of counseling or therapy.

Recently the emphasis has shifted to higher level cognitive skills and a few psychological processes. "Processing" difficulties are now surfacing. "Auditory processing deficits" are common diagnostic impressions. Some children do not seem to hear and understand what is told or asked of them. Some professionals feel they can isolate the parts of the brain that are not functioning during various auditory tasks. That is interesting, but not very useful for instruction. More useful is taking a hard look at what the student is listening to; how interesting it may be; how motivation may be manipulated by changing content and amount, how pre-setting, previewing, and pre-outlining might help; and how setting an expectation for restatement may serve as a guide for how to listen actively. Even modeling listening behavior may reveal to the student what the active process is all about. The teacher listens to a presentation with the student and models a restatement, giving the student an overview of the behavior expected. Seating is important in the classroom so the teacher can establish physical contact child when student attention fails.

Developmental Rates

For the learning disabled group, it helps if "how" not just "what" to learn is made explicit.

In some cases, maturational differences in LD students are much greater than one is given to expect in "average" or "above average" populations. Frequently the learning rates are much slower, and the processing modes are on overload because no one observes the amount any one student can handle before breakdown occurs. We accept these differences in the physical skills area, but don't consider the same possibility for the psychological process skills. Interventions need to be tailored to each student, family, and teacher so that they are realistic. One of the characteristics about learning is that one learns how to learn. That is the basic premise in education. Too often it is implicit in the process but the teaching focus is entirely on content. For the learning disabled group, it helps if "how" not just "what" to learn is made explicit.

Need for Change in All Participants

Parents sometimes ask how long interventions will take to succeed. The answer is that the effort should be expended as long as the need exists, and any modifications of the plan should be carefully and thoughtfully implemented. It might help for both teacher and parent to remember that the task is to continue to try even in the face of discouraging outcomes, especially in the adolescent years. Sometimes, the plan will be to allow the student to face the consequences of his behavior and ask for assistance when he is ready, always making sure he knows it is available.

Parental warmth, defined limits, and respectful treatment lead to self-esteem in children.

The standards and behavior of the parents and teachers have a powerful long term effect on children. There are better chances for success if parents are able to distance themselves from too rigidly held expectations and over-emotional involvement and reassure the child of their acceptance and confidence while they continue their supportive efforts. The possibility of changing adult behavior to change child behavior should always be kept in the realm of possibility. Learning is a social activity, and frequently the changes must come from the other half of the equation – the adults.

Chapter 3

The Steps in the Process

This discussion is not intended as a guide for an Individual Education Plan (as required for a student who qualifies for special education assistance). That meeting has its own process and outcomes established by law. The process described here is an adaptation of the IEP process for regular classroom teachers and parents of students who spend all or most of the day in regular classrooms. Its intent is to elaborate on the IEP process to insure that:

1. Learning is monitored;
2. Enrichment in the curriculum is considered;
3. Small amounts of achievement are recognized and appreciated;
4. Public and private validation of the student's positive skills, talents, or interest occurs;
5. The parent's role is expected, active, clarified, and elaborated;
6. The parents are clear about what is to be done to help the student;
7. The interim communication plan for monitoring progress does not get lost in the press of school activities. In the IEP process, the parent accepts (or sometimes disagrees) with what school professionals set forth. In the process suggested here, the parent is an active, equal initiator, a careful monitor, a protector, partner, advocate, and, frequently, a teacher.

THE PROCESS

1. Observing

(Using test information and description of behavior at school and at home)

2. Planning

(Deciding who, what, when, where, and how) Considering the following five critical issues:

First: Validating strengths, interests, and talents

Second: Remediating or compensating for undeveloped skills

Third: Balance in curriculum focus
Drill and practice and enrichment

Fourth: Setting priorities; selecting the most important areas for instructional focus:

a. Social skills, emotional needs, physical needs

b. Psychological processes: attention, activity level, motivation, impulsivity, independence, persistence, organizational skill, etc.

c. Academic instruction: Oral language as a base for reading and all instruction, reading itself, writing, handwriting, spelling, arithmetic, strategy learning, reasoning, general stimulation, etc.

Fifth: Considering options Available choices in selection of materials or strategies, placement for special instruction, school assistance, tutoring outside of school, or change in school.

3. *Implementing*

(Teaching)

4. *Evaluating*

(Re-observing and testing)

5. *Modifying*

(Changing plans that are not producing improved achievement or self-esteem)

The Assessment-Teaching Process

Figure 1

Shared Instruction

Planning for what will be done at home and at school. Parents should ask to be taught new skills to assist with homework when appropriate. This is advisable during the planning step but is separated here to emphasize its importance.

The Six-Week Rule

Meeting every six weeks to two months is acceptable to monitor the educational process but intervals between meetings should be no longer. This is part of the evaluation step but again is separated for special emphasis.

The Process

Reassurance accompanying special teaching is an under-utilized strategy.

When parents and teachers first become aware that learning is not proceeding as expected, waiting is the usual response. This is based on acceptance of different developmental rates in students and is perfectly logical, but it may prove detrimental to the student. What is not so usual is immediately to provide extra assistance or practice; to try different materials, modal methods, or other strategies; or to vary the amount, instructional rate or response time, nor is it usual to reassure a child that learning will occur. Reassurance accompanying special teaching is an under-utilized strategy. The first step in the process is to observe the child.

1. Observing

There are basically three ways to observe a child. First, the parent and/or teacher gathers information. While this is usually determined by the child's difficulty in school (and, therefore, emphasizes deficits), informal observation often provides valid information. The second way is to use an inventory or a criterion-referenced test. With this approach children are not compared with others but there is usually some framework based on analysis of the curriculum to use as a guide in gathering information about what a student can or cannot do.

The third way is to use standardized tests in which the performance of a student is compared with that of other students. All three

approaches are valuable, for informal observation can sometimes serve as a correction for the other two. For example, perhaps the student didn't perform well on the informal inventory or the standardized test but indeed demonstrated the skill in an informal observation. Inconsistent information about a skill often arises – e.g., a child can recognize a word when reading it in context but fails to recognize it on multiple choice test questions or vice versa.

Sometimes performance is depressed on an entire test because the student did poorly on the first items before he became more comfortable in the testing and understood what the task required. Or a student may do well on meaningful memory tasks and less well on less meaningful tasks.

Observation is like a dim flashlight. One can see better with some light than one can in the dark.

All of the observation approaches gather samples of behavior. None is exhaustive. Observation is like a dim flashlight. One can see better with some light than one can in the dark.

Many teachers develop their own observational techniques and instruments or use informal inventories. In this way they gain a good idea of where children are in terms of school demands. Parents, who know their children well, are less likely to inventory school required skills. They frequently will be ahead of the school in sensing all is not well but have no training in school related needs or the kind of stimulation or instruction they should be giving or securing for their children.

The Psycho-Educational Evaluation

The psycho-educational evaluation is used to identify a student for special education and involves the administration of a battery of tests. The kinds of tests usually administered are:

Ability Test

This is usually an intelligence test. Many educators regard it as an achievement test.

Achievement Test

These tests look at reading, writing, and arithmetic, and sometimes are batteries that observe a simple breakdown in skills. such as comprehension and word attack skills for reading, or computation and concepts for arithmetic. They frequently sample vocabulary skill and simple written language skills such as punctuation and knowledge of basic paragraph structure.

66

Language Test

These are usually vocabulary tests. A language evaluation, often given by a speech/language therapist, uses a different battery of tests and inventories the four levels of language – sound, word, sentence, and meaning.

Perceptual-Motor Test

These modality tests observe visual, visual-motor, and auditory skills as well as discrimination, memory, sequencing, and orientation skills in each modality. Sometimes gross motor skills are also inventoried. Some of these tests are used to obtain limited information about emotional and, possibly, neurological issues.

Projective Test

School psychologists are well trained, and unless there is some special reason to go elsewhere, parents would do well to use their services as the first step in the intervention process.

If emotional and social problems are suspected, projective tests may be used to give the psychologist indications of the cause of observable or suspected behavior. Usually the psychologist who does the testing observes the child in the classroom and on the playground, takes a developmental history from the parent, and asks the teacher for observations and perceptions. Parents can choose school, clinic, or private psychologists to obtain information about their child. All of the evaluations look at the same classes of information. Some are more comprehensive than others. School psychologists are well trained, and unless there is some special reason to go elsewhere, parents would do well to use their services as the first step in the intervention process.

When testing is done in a hospital clinic, a wider range of professionals may observe or test the child. Pediatricians, neurologists, psychiatrists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists (who observe gross and fine motor skills), clinical psychologists or psychiatric social workers may also examine the child and write reports. Special reports by audiologists, ophthalmologists, allergists, and other specialists may also be included.

All of these professionals observe the "test behavior" of the student. They are then able to describe the psychological behavior of the child, including those characteristics described previously, for which there are few tests: attention, motivation, independence-dependence, activity level, impulsiveness, perseverance, distractibility, anxiety, and mood. Sometimes these are described as learning style, and even though described, they are seldom systematically inventoried or written into an IEP on any systematic basis.

Few professionals seem to think of making the curriculum respond to student interest as part of the treatment.

After testing, it is unusual to see a curriculum change written into a prescription. Few professionals seem to think of making the curriculum respond to student interest as part of the treatment. But perhaps that will come, especially if parents grow aware that changes in these behaviors are possible and ask schools to cooperate.

When a child has difficulty in school, the sooner the child is "looked at" with the tools now available, the better. The early developmental period is an especially important one for learning, and parents should ask the school to investigate the problem as soon as they become aware of it so that an intervention can be planned.

2. *Planning*

Once a person's overall strengths have been identified and accepted, that individual can then take responsibility for his or her actions and gain a sense of direction, increased confidence, and improved feelings of self-esteem.

The initial planning for an LD student is usually done at an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. All of the adults who will be working with the child or who have information about his performance meet to fill out a document that considers the information gained from testing and observation. Together they decide: (1) goals; (2) who will provide teaching or service; (3) what they will do, when it will occur, and where and how. The how usually includes the methods to be used and how much achievement is expected during the year. If the student is old enough and if he so desires, he can be included in the meeting.

First: Validating strengths, interests, and talents

A plan to validate a strength, a choice, an ability, an interest or skill (almost never done)

It is quite common to find the strengths of the child listed in the left column on the IEP form. It is not so common to find plans written in the Who, What, When, Where, and How columns to indicate that any plans have been made to validate those strengths.

The assumption is made that since the child already has the strengths, nothing needs to be done. Frequently, the strengths will be expressed in terms of modal preference. Sometimes receptive vs. expressive language skills will be listed. Occasionally a distinction will be made between oral and written language ability. Leadership ability is sometimes mentioned in a description of social skills. Physical prowess may also be mentioned, especially to distinguish it from fine motor skills that may fall into the deficit category.

The dropout process can begin early unless the school and parents place a great deal of positive value on what the student can do and make certain that optimum conditions of learning are maintained.

The dropout process can begin early unless the school and parents place a great deal of positive value on what the student can do and make certain that optimum conditions for learning are maintained. They need to reassure the student that learning will occur and then stay informed and participate in planning educational programs that will make this happen. The student isn't certain that learning will occur. Youngsters cannot see their strengths when only deficits are receiving attention. These students need reassurance and a program that fosters their strengths or at least allows them to become evident. This is not an easy task. But it is not likely to occur at all unless parents ask that plans be made to provide opportunities to demonstrate existing skills, to extend them, and to validate them before peers.

The development of the concept of learning disabilities has allowed us to appreciate differences. Unfortunately, because the field is so multi-faceted, all of the programs and curriculums are not yet well enough developed to deliver services that insure success for every child. The learning disability field has now been in existence long enough to develop awareness that some of our procedures are not working well enough to obtain the ends we desire. Uncomfortable as the current debates may be concerning program and instructional practices, we are on the right track. Eventually this will lead to instruction that will generate achievement for this able group of students and will allow more of them to lead successful lives.

Second: Remediating or compensating for undeveloped skills

A plan to meet a need, remediate or compensate for undeveloped skills
Set goals, select materials, methods, instructors, environment

Special education does this well. The plans are detailed and clear. Most experienced teachers have preferred methods and materials and strategies with which they are comfortable. However, only an hour or two is spent in resource room programs, sometimes not every day, allowing little time for enrichment or balance in the student's school experience. Sometimes the teacher is providing a wealth of rich experiences beyond the 3R's in the regular classroom just when a student is scheduled to leave the classroom for the resource room. Consequently he misses these enriched subjects and activities. Parents can ask that the resource room time be scheduled at the same time the subject is taught in the regular classroom. Unfortunately, this is not always possible, and the student leaves during the time when stimulating, enriching, integrating learning is offered.

Again, this needs to be discussed during the conference so that all of the student's school experience isn't drill and practice. If the school is a "traditional" school, the parent may need to provide these experiences outside of school, using community museum programs, libraries, and planned excursions

One problem in remediation is that instruction may be focused on skills that may take an inordinate amount of time to show improvement.

One problem in remediation is that instruction may be focused on skills that may take an inordinate amount of time to show improvement. Handwriting is a typical example of this. Children may not be developmentally "ready" for this task, and instruction produces only minimal improvement. Sometimes too much time is given to practicing handwriting at the expense of more important skills. Sometimes the instructional strategies focus on too many components that make up handwriting skills, and the student cannot select the critical ones that would make the difference in the skill. Error analysis, with not more that two components chosen to practice, can make a tremendous difference. These can be written at the top of a writing assignment to see if they generalize from practice to use. (See Appendix I for suggested goals.)

The issue of compensation versus remediation needs to be openly discussed. Remediation may not always be the best course to follow.

Many compensatory techniques can be introduced. If there is a great deal of writing required of the student, it may be possible to reduce the requirement or give more time. An older student might be provided to act as secretary part of the time or the parent could serve in this role. A good technique may be to allow the student to turn in whatever has been finished, and then parent and teacher can work together on incentives and reinforcements to promote student responsibility for increasing the amount done each day. This is a good technique for the child with adequate skills when speed and interest are the problem. As soon as the student is old enough, use of a typewriter or computer should be encouraged. A similar situation may also be presented with math facts; here a calculator or chart could be helpful while the skills are being developed. The issue of compensation versus remediation needs to be openly discussed. Remediation may not always be the best course to follow.

It is not suggested that drill and practice in these skills be dropped, only that the time spent in attempting to develop them be limited so that the higher level skills of written language expression or math concepts can be taught and processes emphasized rather than having the whole time taken up with the "facts." The learning disability field is changing, and the ideas just suggested are not so strange. Parents need to know that it is appropriate to discuss them and ask for accommodations.

Third: Balance in curriculum focus

A plan for drill and practice and enrichment

This topic has been touched upon when remediation was discussed but it bears reviewing. It is not usual for this issue to come up in IEP meetings. It is assumed that if a student is "learning disabled," there is a discrepancy between ability and achievement and, therefore, it is unnecessary for instructional focus to support continued cognitive development in a broad sense. There is still a prevalent belief that IQ is fixed and "wired in" and , therefore, that thinking will automatically be taken care of. This is not necessarily true.

Parents would do well to consider not only the needs that are measured by phonics, spelling, math facts, and handwriting tests and all of the "low-level" skills in the language hierarchy. They may need also to consider the issue of broad range thinking skills and to ask the school to consider it as well. Parents can monitor social studies and science tests and writing ability as exemplified in essays and creative writing to make certain growth is occurring in these areas as well as the lower levels exemplified by the usual IEP goals and objectives.

Goals and objectives are written at the lower level skills because there is a lingering belief in special education that all instruction on lower level skills will access higher ones. Linear learning does occur, but just as teaching phonics may not access reading comprehension, so emphasis on out-of-context drill and practice tasks may not build the "experience" base necessary for developing the concepts and processes needed to deveolop discrete skills.

Special education assistance should not forestall the cognitive development of any student.

Special education assistance should not forestall the cognitive development of any student. However, this may happen if parents are not vigilant about the balance issues. In addition, the stigma and boredom of the program may contribute to turning the student off from becoming an active learner. The dropout population consists of a goodly percentage of children in special education. Clearly, curriculum practices in this field need review.

Learning is not simple. It is a complex process. The best parents can do is make sure that the elements of a good education are available to their children and not precluded because special education assistance is needed.

71

Fourth: Setting priorities

Selecting the most important areas or skills for instructional focus

Earlier a hierarchy was set forth, listing social/emotional issues as the foundation for learning, with physical issues following and academic issues last. Of course, in actuality, all of these skills are developing at once. But the hierarchy is an appropriate way to think about groups of children and to insure that in the academic setting, the first two are not precluded by emphasis on the last.

Because of the focus on deficits in special education, frequently all of the instructional attention is concentrated on the area with the lowest achievement. As an example, when a student demonstrates a relative strength in reading (but still below grade level) and a serious difficulty dealing with the mathematics area, the tendency may be to give major instructional time and emphasis to the math area. Yet, in order to deal with school and life's demands, reading is more important than math. Parents need to consider the fact that major attention should be placed on language and reading in such situations. Math is not ignored, but reading is the priority.

Fifth: Considering options

Placement options are often limited, but curriculum options offer a wide range of choice.

By the time the IEP conference is concluded, the professional staff has decided on placement and curriculum interventions. The test information has been translated into an educational plan. The placement can offer only the options the school has available unless the parent knows of something else and is willing to pay for it or uses a professional advocate to argue for it, in which case the school may be required to pay. When school suggestions about placement and curriculum interventions are presented to the parent for approval, this is the point at which parent knowledge is essential. In order to assess the appropriateness of the plan, the parent needs to know what placement options are available in and out of the school and whether the diagnostic information has been translated into a program that is likely to be effective.

Placement options are limited even if the parent can afford to pay for them. Many private schools will not accept students who require special assistance. Private special education schools are not plentiful and are usually costly. Private tutoring, to be effective, should occur at least twice a week, and it, too, is expensive if provided by a specialist. For most parents public school assistance is the only option. That

is why a parent's knowledge about the effect of placement on learning is so important.

On the other hand, there is a tremendous variety in choices of materials, methods, and strategies. At the first IEP the parent may not be able to evaluate the suitability of the possibilities suggested. Sometimes the diagnosis of a learning disability has come as a surprise to the parent, and there hasn't been enough time to learn everything that needs to be known to effectively judge either placement or curriculum suggestions.

If there is any question about the contents of the IEP, parents should consult with each of the professionals individually before turning to outsiders. School staff members are knowledgeable, usually well trained, and are available to share expertise and to help parents participate in assisting their own child.

If there is doubt about what the school is proposing, then it is quite in order to discuss the issues with someone outside of the school.

Another resource at this time would be professional advocates who have emerged to fill this need. Their services include both curriculum and legal advice. In addition, many school psychologists, educational psychologists, and learning disability teachers in private practice are available for consultation. If there is doubt about what the school is proposing, then it is quite in order to discuss the issues with someone outside of the school. Sometimes a student will be placed in an inappropriate program. Sometimes the curriculum plan is not broad enough, doesn't cover any area but academics, and will not produce the desired learning. The school's intent is positive but the effect on learning may turn out to be negative. In such a case it is helpful for parents to discuss these issues with a professional not connected with the school.

In summary, during the planning stage, it is important to discuss and plan for the five critical issues and at the same time to remember that there is a hierarchy of needs in the structure of the conference that also require planning. In essence, the critical issues in order of importance in the planning step of the process are: validation, remediation/compensation, balance in curriculum emphasis, setting priorities, and considering options. Within the structure of the conference, the discussion areas are the social/emotional, the physical, and the academic needs of the student discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

3. *Implementing*

Implementation of the plan includes teaching and starting other professional services if they are required. Counseling and occupational therapy are common interventions that might be provided, sometimes by the school and sometimes secured by the parent. Other services that parents often obtain on their own are medical interventions, vision therapy, biofeedback training and its variant neurobiofeedback training, tutoring, and nutritional treatments.

Some interventions are not supported by positive research findings. They are still controversial although many are sold as absolutes. Yet frequently a parent has tried a debatable treatment and found that it did make a difference for the child. Perhaps the therapy didn't "cure" the child but it did make a difference. Parents may want to try an intervention if the student's needs match the claims made for that therapy, but they need to watch the results very closely.

Children who are exposed to every possible intervention and tested by many specialists may get the message that clearly says, "Something is seriously wrong with me."

Taking a child to specialist after specialist may have a hidden negative result. Children who are exposed to every possible intervention and tested by many specialists may get a message that clearly says, "Something is seriously wrong with me." Sometimes no one takes the time to give the child a full explanation of what a learning disability is thought to be, and what is involved in minimizing it, compensating for it, or eliminating it. And treatments that don't result in major improvements only serve to depress the child's self-esteem. Sometimes, however, the assistance works the other way. All of the attention is good for the child and going to the therapist is enjoyable. In the tutoring or treatment the child is meeting adult demands and is being positively reinforced. Nevertheless, parents need to be vigilant in watching the child's response and progress. LD children do not have evenly developed skills, and consequently their responses are not evenly forthcoming.

4. *Evaluating*

Evaluations should occur at regular intervals, but these periods may not be long enough to determine if progress will be sufficient. There isn't any rule of thumb about when it may be time for a change in program or approach. The student's feelings should always be acknowledged. Even when feelings are negative, if the method has been successful for children with similar needs, the child should be encouraged to stay with the technique for a longer period. Often when an end is specified, the student is willing to continue with the method or material. If after six months to a year of using a strategy, no progress is noted in informal and standardized evaluations, and

the student is beginning to voice negative feelings, the instructional plan should be totally changed.

5. Modifying

Usually modification of the plans occurs after formal tests are given at the end of the academic year. Parents will be sharing observations about progress, including specific information about attained skills that are part of the total process. It may be possible to determine at this time that a treatment has been totally inappropriate. Perhaps the child hates the method or is bored by the strategy. Perhaps the child is compliant but just isn't making progress.

There is never just one way to do anything. If, for example, reading, which is often a subject where a particular approach turns out to be fruitless, is not improving, then the diagnostic information needs to be reviewed, an analysis of errors needs to be made, and a reconsideration of the problem needs to occur and an alternative strategy selected.

Shared Instruction

The educational needs of the student are not totally the responsibility of the school.

Some traditions in education need to be set aside when the needs of a student with learning disabilities are being met. The main concern in this book – and one that needs to be emphasized over and over again – is that the educational needs of the student are not totally the responsibility of the school. Parents should not allow professionals full power over educational decisions.

Parents usually give up their teaching role when students enter school, and both parents and teachers accept this change. However, when a student (1) enters school without some needed skills; or (2) is slower or delayed in development; or (3) is resistant; or (4) when the educational program does not provide the needed intervention, sharing the definition of the problem, the decision making, and the actual educational process is an absolute necessity.

As parents will be assisting with homework or hiring someone to tutor their child, it behooves them to know what the problem is and what the range of instructional solutions may be. Too frequently the parent puts full faith in the professional community and becomes upset and flounders when achievement is unsatisfactory.

75

The Six Week Rule

The saddest moment for some parents must be the final IEP meeting at the end of the year when they are told that the tests do not show progress. The pain and anguish of the parent can be overwhelming as can be the sense of defeat for the student.

In order to preclude this state of affairs, parents need to ask for a meeting at six weeks to two month intervals. It is easy to set forth a beautiful IEP and be unaware that it is not producing results or to be so sure the method, material, or approach is the "right" one, failure to show results is ignored.

There is no absolute timetable for learning, and, of course, LD students differ in their response to methods, materials, and approaches more than students without differences in skill development. But if the parent and teacher discuss whether the approach is appropriate and what the indications are that some learning is taking place, they can jointly make the decision to continue or to abandon the approach and try another.

There are many indications that learning is taking place even when a test, if given, does not show a grade level difference. The parent can describe what is occurring at home; the teacher, at school. If reading is the issue, reading behavior can be described – e.g., how many books read; how many spelling patterns covered and retained; how many sight words learned; a decrease in errors in oral reading; an increase in comprehension by the number and type of questions answered correctly or demonstrated awareness of content; the ability to retell the information in a silent reading assignment; and last, but not least, an improved interest in reading for information, enjoyment, and communication.

If there is a sense of a need for review, changes are likely to be made before too much time has been wasted with an inappropriate plan.

Parents need to monitor the process and the five steps (observation, planning, implementation, evaluation, and modification) at each conference. If no reviews are scheduled, goals and objectives may be adhered to rigidly when they are clearly unsuitable. If there is a sense of a need for review, changes are likely to be made before too much time has been wasted with an inappropriate plan.

76

Chapter 4

Thinking Skills

Special education evaluations do not directly observe or assess the thinking processes that are called "higher order" processes in students who are having difficulty in school. That means, simply, observing the way children think. The tests now available observe performance out of the context in which the processes are used in school performance. Certain subtests in an intelligence test will give some measure of specific skills involved in thinking as do some of the subtests in achievement tests. Nevertheless, none of the tests requires children to solve problems nor do they require the observer to analyze which thinking skills are being used or not being used. That probably will be the next diagnostic thrust in the field of education and will allow in-context and individualized observations of how individual students approach specific content, what their motivation and interest in the task is, and how that affects learning.

Students need to learn that sometimes their education needs to be teacher directed, and teachers and schools need to learn that sometimes education needs to be student selected.

Schools are not tutorial programs, and mass, free education means that compromises need to be made on both sides for youngsters with learning disabilities. The students need to learn that sometimes their education needs to be teacher directed, and the teacher and the school need to learn that sometimes education needs to be student selected.

If scores on our present test instruments are average or above, we assume thinking to be adequate. We do not have a systematic set of levels or a matrix of thinking skills that are directly related to school function which tell us that a particular child is having difficulty with association or cause and effect – or inference – or prediction – or analogous thinking. When these skills are present, they are observed out of context and cannot represent the thinking behavior of the student in a manner that can be used effectively for remediation. And when they are practiced from puzzles and workbooks, they are likely to follow the fate of other "training" programs – i.e., they do not generalize to the academic tasks where they are needed.

In the early grades few schools instruct directly in thinking processes or try to require complex, challenging ones such as a focus on problem solving. There is a pervasive notion that children come to school with a fixed amount of "intelligence" and thinking ability, and schools don't have to address this area – since it is fixed, there is little that can be done to increase it.

Intelligence means many things but reasoning is an especially important aspect in school learning. Reasoning is assumed to be implicitly involved in instruction if it is considered at all. Most science, math, and social studies programs address this problem in teacher's guides and in the construction of the program itself. That is why it is so important not to remove the children from these classes for drill in the 3R's.

In pre-service education of teachers,the frequent emphasis on questioning strategies provides an instructional tool for use across all curriculum areas. Questioning strategies are excellent tools but are not substitutes for activities in the curriculum that challenge children to solve problems and to learn to ask the questions themselves. When only the teacher has the questioning skill or opportunity, it tends to increase passivity in the teaching-learning process.

Thinking may not develop fully or may atrophy if it is not modeled and required of children.

If children's curiosity is dampened or not encouraged in pre-school life, and if responses in school are limited to "correct" answers, passivity in thinking is likely to be the outcome although it may not be an inherent inadequacy in the individual child. Thinking may not develop fully or may atrophy if it is not modeled and required of children.

Parents as Models

Within families, parents model their own thinking behavior in the process of living. Parents make choices and solve problems. Which microwave oven or car will they buy and why? They discuss the news. They comment on books they have read and evaluate them and sometimes give reasons. It probably is an unusual family that explicitly decides to teach its children to think. But problems are solved, reasoning is frequently overt, and young children are observing and participating in thinking and reasoning without an explicit design.

The quality of the reasoning and thinking skills of the parents can shape those that the children either develop or do not develop. Parents would do well to read on this topic and become more aware of the model they are setting and how important it is to provide lots of stimulating experiences outside of school that are discussed and questioned in the family. It isn't enough to provide the stimulation. It is also important for parents to talk about the experiences, to share their thinking, and, most important, to encourage the children not only to talk about them but to relate them to experiences they have had in the past or they have heard about.

Perception – What Is It?

One of the reasons parents have so much difficulty with the designation "perceptual motor problems" is that most parents don't spend much time thinking about thinking. When the perceptual part of thinking is separated from the thinking part, it becomes difficult for the uninitiated parent to know what the professionals are talking about. In addition, parents are not used to separating the issues of acuity (the mechanics of being able to hear and see; the function of the eye or ear that receives stimulation) from perception. Perception involves the delivery of information to the brain and central nervous system. It consists of information coming in through the senses. Perception is concerned with the what and how information is stored and recalled. Memory is involved. In order to remember something, it must be discriminated, that is, it must be perceived as a structure with details or sequences.

Cognition involves hooking incoming information delivered by the senses to information that has already been stored and its availability for recall and use with new information.

Perception and cognition probably don't actually involve separate functions in performance. They most likely occur simultaneously. Cognition involves hooking incoming information delivered by the senses to information that has already been stored and its availability for recall and use with new information. It is only when perception and cognition don't seem to be working in some way that analysis or testing helps to direct instruction.

Parents should not be thought inadequate because they don't understand what these processes involve. Professionals frequently do not understand them either, but they have become comfortable with the uncertainty and meagerness of the test information. They have combined some strategies for planning interventions with what they know about what works for the various categories of skills that test information delivers. They know what discrimination, sequencing, and memory difficulties mean when the errors occur in the 3R's and can make some kind of sense of the test information. They pair this with what they know about task analysis in the various subject areas. Although test information and task analysis are often an uncomfortable match, it is what is available at the present time.

Learning – A Complex Activity

Perhaps our children are better off without having more cognitive-perceptual tests available. Our evaluation-instructional procedures always seem to try to test skills in out-of-context situations and then

79

attempt to generalize teaching plans based on incomplete discrete skill information. Our efforts tend to view learning as a set of steps that can be organized from simple to complex or from easy to difficult. Learning simply does not occur in such neat sequences, even though curriculum can and often is constructed in this fashion. This does not mean that direct teaching of thinking behavior with whatever is at hand is not valuable. Bravo to the parents and teachers who try to instruct children to think and who consider the process of learning, that is, "how to learn," as well as the content, and who understand that there must be some freedom to individually integrate learning experiences. That is why so much emphasis in this discussion is placed on active, project, group, and self-selected learning. These approaches offer children the opportunity to assimilate experiences and relationships not available in drill and practice and allow them to think better and to stay interested in thinking.

Deductive and Inductive Learning Processes

Some children can and need to analyze the total instructional process before they are able to understand how the pieces they are learning hook together. They are deductive learners. They need to see how everything fits and use analytic thinking to organize information. Many of us do better when there is a demonstration or pictures accompanying an explanation. Others need to add pieces up to understand relationships. People who use this synthetic method of thinking are inductive learners. Most children and adults use both processes, sometimes analyzing processes and sometimes synthesizing information.

The point is that out-of-context drill and practice may not predispose students to synthesize the information or generalize the skills being taught or even allow them to try if experience with the total process is not provided. It seems unreasonable to deny this possibility to those who do not naturally move back and forward in integrating these processes. This is exactly what happens with reading programs that emphasize phonics. A single approach is expected to meet the needs of all children, and it doesn't involve complete instruction or even awareness of what reading is for: social communication, information, and enjoyment.

Reading as a Prime Example

Reading is a good example because it is a thinking act. Most current instruction is based on the idea that learning the sound-letter relationships will automatically lead to comprehension. It is seldom explained to students that the whole act of reading is about thinking and social interaction. It involves the act of bringing meaning to the content from past experience. It often involves actively reaching out for the new information and selecting and integrating it with one's

own experience. It frequently takes reflection and time to weigh and consider meaning. It isn't automatic; a very active thinking interaction with the thought of the author is required. It is regrettable that most children are taught that reading is about figuring out how to pronounce each word.

It will be difficult for everyone in the field of education to accept the idea of reading as a social communication. It will take time.

It is usually expected that understanding will develop in the experience of sounding out words. To re-emphasize, meaning is in the mind of the reader based on experience already stored about the information offered in the reading selection. Reading is not a passive activity. It involves hooking the information coming in to information already stored, which makes the new information "meaningful" and comprehensible. Most of us have had the experience of reading about something for which we have no previous experience. Even though we can sound out the words and pronounce them, we have no background for the information in the text to make any sense of it. When that occurs, we must go to other sources, such as additional reading or talking to people, to develop enough background to comprehend what is being presented. It will be difficult for everyone in the field of education to accept the idea of reading as social communication. It will take time.

Direct instruction in comprehension that is just as organized as that provided for learning phonics is also necessary for many students. Teacher questioning does not provide enough information about what is involved in comprehension that will cultivate an active stance in the reader unless, through questions, the reader can actively hook up the content to previous experience. Strategies need to be at hand when attention fails, when understanding of the text falters, and when student background is insufficient. When comprehension flounders, and readers find they haven't understood, they need to monitor their own comprehension and have some strategies for returning to an effective relationship with the information on the page. Sometimes the strategies will deal with inattention, sometimes with lack of background. Whichever strategy is used, the student must understand the necessity for actively reaching out for new information and relating it to past experience and knowledge. Reading isn't about decoding words although that is a necessary skill. Meaning and comprehension won't be easily and automatically achieved until the act of actively bringing meaning to the text is understood as the main reading process.

Silent reading is what most of us need to be able to do rapidly and well.

Too much oral reading in the early years may help the teacher identify those phonic elements a child knows or doesn't know, but it may make the student overly dependent on the oral input and make it

more difficult to develop proficiency in silent reading. Silent reading is what most of us need to be able to do rapidly and well. There isn't a lot of emphasis placed on how to teach children to read silently because, again, it is assumed that phonics is the magic wand and the early objective is to sound out words fluently.

A Societal Need

Recently educators have begun to discuss reasoning and problem-solving skills as a societal need. This may mean that school curriculums will reflect the need and begin to develop ways to teach students to think, to actively question their own understanding, to learn processes, not just skills and facts. Let's hope that the efforts won't turn into training programs but will be genuine problem-solving learning in content areas. Parents have the opportunity to influence the direction curriculum will take if they voice their opinions. This is an important issue for the learning disabilities population because of the minimal focus on thinking skills in their current education.

Chapter 5

The Importance of Language

In the elementary school, the 3R's are basic elements in the curriculum. However, reading, writing (including spelling), and arithmetic need to be joined by receptive oral language as basic in improving achievement for the floundering student. Oral language develops before written language, and receptive oral language is usually more highly developed than expressive oral language. In the primary grades, receptive oral language, or what a child understands, needs a special emphasis in early remediation plans.

In order to succeed in learning written language, a child must have sufficient receptive oral language development.

It is commonly stated that oral language is well developed in children by age five. This statement has been so fully accepted that as a base for reading, receptive oral language is not systematically assessed when children enter school and are faced with learning written language. In order to succeed in learning written language, a child must have sufficient receptive oral language development. The relationship between oral and written language must be considered in a hierarchical relationship. In most classrooms children listen to the teacher. They are not required to systematically use expressive language for communicating their ideas. When children are tested, even for a learning disability, it isn't the usual procedure to include a language evaluation if the verbal scores on the intelligence tests are average or above. It is assumed that if the child can perform on the verbal tests, the language skill is adequate.

In the early years of the learning disability movement, it was accepted that the problem for the student who was not learning to read was one involving efficient visual perception. We are now aware that receptive oral language, reasoning, and grammar or word structure as well as problems in sound discrimination or auditory perception can also be stumbling blocks on the road to achievement. While most children learn language naturally in family life, they don't all learn it equally well. Although reading develops receptive language, there may be problems if the child's difficulty in oral language development surfaces with learning written language as well.

It might help to understand the role of language in achievement by thinking of written language (including reading and writing and spelling) as a symbol system of a communication process that is preceded by the oral language symbol system used for the same

purpose and that both of these symbol systems are used for social interactions that are the base of our experience and cognitive development.

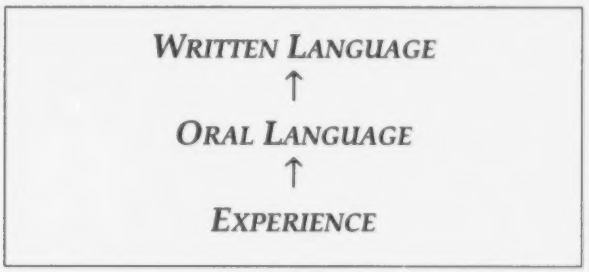

Figure 2

The understanding of the hierarchical relationship shown in Figure 2 is essential for successful beginning instruction in reading as it now occurs. If oral language or the student's understanding of language is not well developed, it may be difficult to be successful in learning to read, especially with the current phonic emphasis. The relationship later changes somewhat when reading itself develops and contributes greatly to language, both receptive and expressive forms, and to broadening the vicarious experience base.

Whole language theorists take exception to this and state that the hierarchical relationship is not the important issue for reading, that it is the act of communicating which undergirds both systems that is the important issue. In their view, the word is not the cornerstone of reading; creating meaning is because they view word meaning as dependent on context. They contend that actual use is the condition under which learning to read occurs. It isn't a matter of using or integrating "skills" in context, or learning language skills, it is a matter of becoming a skilled language user. In *Whole Language, What's the Difference?"*, the authors state , "It is learning rooted in a super system of conventions that governs all the interactive social, conceptual, and linguistic contexts of one's community." This is a totally different conception of reading than the one currently in use. Perhaps, when this idea permeates our curriculum, more children will be able to become readers, and the national test scores will not demonstrate phonics at grade level and comprehension two years behind.

Certainly, this involves a fundamental change in school philosophy and practice. Obviously this fits well into the philosophy that the learning disabled need a "good" education. It clarifies the idea of "activity" based when the theory proposes that students would do science as a scientist would, not just as science activities or experi-

ments. It takes that need of a "good" education one step further and provides a rationale for "authentic" experience that grows out of interest or the need for information about how to do something. It would be an invaluable model for educating the learning disabled because the model we use is so dismal and fails so many of our children.

If we change the model of language learning to theories of whole language learning to look like this,

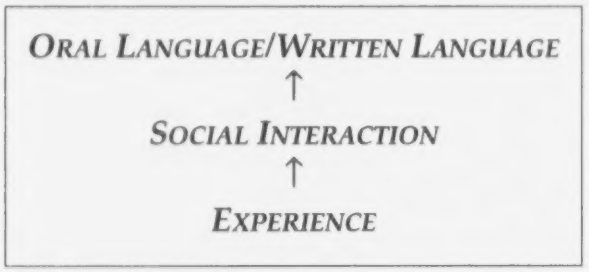

Figure 3

then oral and written language are seen as parallel social interaction communication systems that should be learned in the same way. Although not exactly the same form, their purpose and use is the same, and their development is mediated by use for personal communication with others.

A language assessment may be in order when a child fails to learn to read or preferably as soon as parents become aware that the child is encountering considerable difficulty.

Still, a language assessment may be in order when a child fails to learn to read or preferably as soon as parents become aware that the child is encountering considerable difficulty. It would be helpful if a language survey were administered to children just before reading instruction began to determine whether increased language social interaction or whole language with its emphasis on authentic use of language in learning to read should be the starting point – or if current phonic approaches with more practice are more likely to succeed. Whole language teachers are not yet in plentiful supply, but if parents can find one, these teachers may have more success with some LD students than current teaching offers.

One of the problems for the learning disabled is that a language deficit is part of the definition. It is quite possible that the whole language approach to teaching might assist by bypassing the difficulty LD youngsters have with phonics and that the natural process would remediate the "subtle psycholinguistic" difficulty that keeps them from mastering phonic methods.

Four Levels of Language

Language has four levels. They can be described as, first, the sound level of language, which includes the smallest parts that make up words. Words are the next level, and they are not only made up of sounds, but also of larger units called syllables, roots, prefixes, affixes, and suffixes. This is called the structure of words, and a second part to the word level involves the meaning of the word. The third level is the sentence level where there are rules by which words combine to express thoughts and ideas. The last and highest level is the meaning level, and here all the other levels combine to make language express meaning, understanding, reasoning, and comprehension of experience. Although they are hierarchical in Figure 2, in experience they are all developing at the same time and are not separable. These levels are the same for oral and written language but the rules to the levels in oral language are not identical with those for written language.

Two Forms for Each System

Both oral and written language have two aspects, a receptive form and an expressive form. In oral language the receptive form is listening, and the expressive form is speaking. In written language, the receptive form is reading, and the expressive form is writing. Almost all diagnostic information can be placed in this chart (Figure 4) to determine where strengths are and where instructional need or continued observation is in order.

	ORAL LANGUAGE 1ST ORDER REPRESENTATION		WRITTEN LANGUAGE 2ND ORDER REPRESENTATION	
	AUDITORY (RECEPTIVE)	VOCAL (MOTOR) (EXPRESSIVE)	VISUAL (RECEPTIVE)	VISUAL MOTOR (EXPRESSIVE)
LINGUISTIC LEVEL	LISTENING	SPEAKING	READING	WRITING
SEMANTIC (meaning; reasoning)				
SYNTACTIC (grammer; sentence structure)				
MORPHOLOGIC (word meaning; word structure)				
PHONOLOGIC (sound-symbol relationships)				

ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC AND MODAL PERFORMANCE

Figure 4

86

Until whole language appeared on the instructional scene, the only alternative to phonics approaches was use of the experience story as a vehicle for developing language and linking reading. While it has been a valuable alternative, as a method it misses the essential point that whole language theorists are making: the use of written language as a genuine medium of social interaction and communication.

When a remedial program is planned for a young student who is failing to use written language adequately, the receptive oral language base on which reading may rest needs to be inventoried through test and observation. All four levels of oral language can be explored to determine if there are areas not well mastered, giving the teacher some idea of where to place instructional emphasis.

If there are inadequately developed skills in receptive oral language, a student may encounter difficulty in learning the written form of language, both reading and writing, in some way. If the receptive oral language base is well developed many students do well in mastering the receptive form of written language (reading) no matter what method is used. They may still have difficulties in the expressive form (writing and spelling). Very few individuals, almost no one, does well in writing and spelling but poorly in reading.

As soon as any difficulty occurs, parents need to request an assessment and ask how the information about receptive and expressive oral language will be used in instruction.

In the school conference, usually at the end of kindergarten or beginning of first grade, some assessment of oral language skill can be made. Children frequently have very good receptive oral language but are reluctant to use it in speaking. They never speak well if the receptive base is weak or deficient, and then reading will suffer as well. Unfortunately, language observations are infrequently done, and if done, infrequently used. As soon as any difficulty occurs, parents need to request an assessment and ask how the information about receptive and expressive oral language will be used in instruction.

Written Language

Reading involves recognition as a memory skill, which is an easier process than recall, the process required for writing. In reading, someone else, the author, has dealt with the structure of the form and content, and the reader has only to receive the message. Recognizing the structure of form and content is easier than generating it. In writing not only the structure of words, sentences, paragraphs, and form (essay, poem, description, story) but the content needs to be

87

organized and constructed from experience or stored information. Therefore, the task is much more complex. All experience and information must be completely differentiated and stored in memory so that all of it can be recalled and integrated in the expressive act involved in writing, even when fantasy is the content.

Teaching written language, i.e., reading, writing, and spelling, is the major task of the elementary school.

Teaching written language, i.e., reading, writing, and spelling, is the major task of the elementary school. Oral and written language mediates all subject matter competence. After a student begins to read, written language can enhance receptive language, but in the beginning the receptive base needs to be developed at all four levels: sound, word, grammar, and meaning.

Some students seem to be able to communicate orally very well, but when they pick up a pen or a pencil, the motor acts required of writing seem to conflict with the thinking process. They don't seem to be able to think and write at the same time. Pinpointing the oral strength and the writing weakness means that instruction can be very precise. Plans can be made to slowly and simultaneously build the skill of using the two processes at the same time. The main strategies would be to pre-plan and to reduce amount.

Listening

It is important to understand that when testing a student, test information may be inaccurate and should be validated in natural social interaction situations.

The informal observation of receptive language, or what the child understands, may include describing the student's behavior in relation to remembering directions or information that has been presented. Such an informal observation would describe listening performance both at home and at school. A slightly more formal exploration might include reading a story to the child and asking questions about the content or, much better, asking that the story be retold. This kind of observation gathers information at the meaning level of language, but includes knowledge of sentence sense and vocabulary as well. It also includes information about auditory memory and the ability to sequence ideas or events. It is important to understand that when testing a student, test information may be inaccurate and should be validated in natural social interaction situations.

Auditory memory is fragile, and many influences can interfere with it. Learning and memory always interact. That should be kept in mind when assessing memory and when interpreting standardized test information, which includes a great deal of "out of context" auditory observations.

If graded paragraphs from a reading test are read to a student, and he is asked to retell the material or to answer questions about it, the point at which the student fails can serve as a guide for matching language competence to reading competence – i.e, a comparison can be made between listening and reading skill. Listening behavior elicited in this way can provide a guide to reading level. If the listening skill is at or above grade level, the student has general linguistic competence sufficient to support reading at that level and perhaps higher. If the student is lagging in a phonic approach, the method then becomes critical.

A Dynamic Process

Listening is a very active process just as reading is. The individual not only has to be willing to hear what is being presented, but has to be reaching out, actively integrating the information or message with what has already been learned and stored. It is a dynamic process in which the reader is relating new information to old, noting some questions about the content and self-monitoring comprehension.

Many children who are described as having auditory processing disorders have not learned or have suppressed "active" learning behavior.

Many children who are described as having auditory processing disorders have not learned or have suppressed "active" learning behavior. It is this active part of the process that may need to be taught. Remedial exercises should be based on the caveat regarding the relation between meaning and memory. Exercises using memory for sequences of digits or sentences or words will waste valuable time.

Modeling appropriate listening behavior and extending the child's capacity by reinforcing or rewarding approximations, by correcting, and by providing a sample of the expected behavior may prove helpful. The teacher reads the selection and the questions and retells the story or provides possible answers so that the student understands the complete process. Explaining that listening involves reaching out to receive the information, that it doesn't automatically flow in and get stored, may provide direction about this process that the child may not have realized is necessary. Of course, if the information is inherently interesting, that will help.

An informal observation at the sound level of language gathers information on hearing the number, the position, and the discrimination of sounds in words. If children cannot differentiate the sounds, most of them will not be able to connect the sounds to the letters. At the word level, information is provided about meaning and the ability to hear the number of parts or syllables in a word. This is not observed separately unless the child fails, and the teacher has some inkling about

the relationship of oral to written language when phonic methods are the predominant instruction mode. Sound discrimination at the receptive oral level needs to be tested or observed carefully. Sometimes making the relationship clear is all that needs to be done.

Speaking

If the child uses complete sentences and can describe an experience with an organization and sequence to the events, the meaning level of language can be observed. The length and complexity of sentences and the choice of vocabulary are also available in this observation. Articulation of sounds in words provides evidence of either competency or of need at this level of language. A language sample can be taken easily and informally as an adult talks with a child and asks questions or requests retelling a story or recounting information from experience.

The use of rhyming or consonant substitution in a child's imaginative play or with friends provides an indication of awareness at the sound level of language. An example of rhyming might be such exclamations as, "Look, the cat is on the mat and has on a red hat" or of consonant substitution, "I think you are a teeny meanie weenie." This also provides a sample of the child's awareness of language as a process in which words can be played with and manipulated.

If the informal observation suggests some questions about proficiency, a formal observation by a speech and language therapist is in order.

If the informal observation suggests some question about proficiency, a formal observation by a speech and language therapist is in order. Formal language observations are not automatic in psychoeducational evaluations.

Reading Skill Observation

The same four levels of language (sound, word, sentence, meaning) can serve as guides for informal observation of reading skill. Comprehension can be observed by asking the student to read and answer questions or retell the content. The kinds of questions asked can tap higher level thinking processes, such as generalization, inference, and prediction. In retelling, the sense of structure, sequence, and memory for detail may also be observed. Comprehension always involves thinking skills but may also be dependent on the student's past experiences that might relate to the content.

90

At the word level, assessment is made by observing sight word memory. Sight words are often irregular in spelling patterns but may be commonly used in books. Phonological skills are also assessed, which include the ability to remember irregular spellings and to learn, remember, and use sound-letter associations as well as the rules by which they combine to form the spelling patterns. Irregular spellings where letters and sounds are not one to one can pose problems for many children. Often youngsters can learn them in the out-of-context forms in which they are frequently taught but cannot generalize them or recognize them when the context changes.

Writing Skill Observation

The structure and content of writing needs to be observed separately from the skills of spelling and handwriting.

The following need to be addressed in instruction: (1) choice of subject matter; (2) sentence complexity; (3) use of negatives, passives, referents; (4) word and phrase order; (5) choice of vocabulary; (6) paragraph structure (not only with introduction, body, and conclusion but also smooth transitions in sentences and paragraphs). Students need to become aware of the basic kinds of writing: descriptive, narrative, informative, and analytic. They should be given practice in each type and with mixed types. In creative writing, students would benefit from some instruction in story structure and poetic forms. Difficulty in writing may not necessarily reflect cognitive (thinking) and language inadequacy but only that the student has not been taught that writing involves communication with an audience and has different structures and forms.

Difficulties with spelling occur at the word level of language and frequently determine how the student will do at the meaning level. Students often organize content around words they are certain they can spell. Perceptual motor information and ability is abundant in spelling errors and they are a rich source for an instructional plan. Using error analysis instead of modality processing information in standardized tests can make the teaching more exactly fit the individual student's need. Students often have clearly identifiable problems with those elements that must be heard and those that can only be seen. Handwriting in terms of motor proficiency is difficult to evaluate in spelling tasks because continuity occurs only when words are written in sentences. But even words written in lists provide a great deal of information about handwriting skill. Error analysis in hand-

91

writing is easy to learn to use and is excellent for remedial instruction. (See Appendix I for error analysis.)

Arithmetic Skill Observation

In analyzing arithmetic needs, the student's language may frequently require careful observation to be certain that basic quantitative concepts are in the student's vocabulary and well grasped.

The analysis should include: (1) the knowledge of counting; (2) the sense of number (the two-ness or seven-ness of a numeral); (3) the language or concepts of quantity (more, less, plus, minus, etc.); (4) the "facts"; and (5) the processes like addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and percentages that require the "facts." It may be especially difficult for some students to remember the series of steps that complex arithmetic processes require.

Observation of Skills in Other Content Areas

Oral language, reading, writing, and math are the base for competence in all other curriculum areas. However, attention, memory, eye-hand coordination, use of strategy and other complex cognitive processes (thinking) are also all critically important. Does the student have strategies for coping with areas that are not yet developed? Does impulsiveness preclude reasoning? Are organizational skills evident or do they need instructional attention? These issues are included in the Parent-Teacher Conference Checklist (Appendix II) for use in discussions and planning.

92

Chapter 6

Other Factors That Impact Learning

Philosophy of Education

Most regular classroom teachers haven't been trained to work with children whose differences in skills preclude their performance within the average ranges.

Every school program is based on an educational philosophy whether the professionals state it or not Most school programs are dedicated to supporting changes in students. Once special testing is completed, assistance is set into motion, and expectations are that the student will change, will learn what others deem appropriate. Learning will then take place in the manner expected of "average" students. Almost all regular education is geared to average students, and expectations are that all students will perform at least close to this range. Because public education is provided for everyone, it would seem a reasonable expectation. However, most regular classroom teachers haven't been trained to work with children whose differences in skills preclude their performance within the average ranges. The tradition for difference is that it is to be served elsewhere. That does not mean that regular classroom teachers could not learn to serve differences effectively; it only means that to date tradition has not required them to do so.

The philosophical base for special education is simply improving performance so that students can deal with the demands for average performance. However, almost all special assistance focuses on what the student cannot do, and intervention is frequently provided in the form of drill and practice. It takes a highly motivated and self-confident youngster, with moderate differences and not too many of them, to learn in the face of these negatives.

Changing Expectations and School Demands

Meeting achievement expectations enhances students' self-esteem and contributes to their feelings of adequacy. Students frequently will resist changes and adjustments in curriculum demands if they feel they will be perceived as different (by their peers) or inadequate to the task. This needs to be considered very carefully as curriculum changes are made. It is unfair to ask a student to do something for which failure is a foregone conclusion. In a class in which every student is expected to complete the same amount in the same

specified time, the LD student may be at a disadvantage. Special help that is identified with the inadequacy also has its problems.

If the goal is to protect the student's self-esteem and motivation, parents and teachers can work together to that end. Sometimes this goal is more important than lesson content, and parents should not hesitate to ask that attention be paid to these two important dimensions of learning.

When curiosity and a desire to learn are not present, the adults in the child's life need to examine what might have destroyed them.

Curiosity and a desire to learn are natural in children. When they are not present, the adults in the child's life need to examine what might have destroyed them. Over-control and boring curriculum may bear their share as partial culprits.

It is true that one of life's important skills is to learn to delay gratification and to accept rules and limitations. We are social beings so we must accept the responsibilities that social living requires. It is important to develop the skills that are necessary to function comfortably in society. Sometimes attending to the *en route* learning necessary to reach an objective is exactly what a whole population of students is not able to do. Drill and practice does not address a problem that frequently involves the ability to persevere in the face of failure and to do something the student doesn't want to do. It isn't the academic content that is the problem; it is the reason for the inability to meet school demands that needs consideration. Forewarnings, counseling, and incentives can be helpful. But there is another solution that is seldom considered.

An alternative program to heavy academic demands is possible, especially when the philosophy of the school embraces the concept of difference as normal and sets standards matched to student needs.

It is possible to conceive of a program that would provide assistance in remediating deficits, but would also very early provide increased stimulation, mediation, and assistance with skill development, validation of difference, and love of learning, and would delay instruction for students where developmental delay was suspected. Most important, such a program would compensate for skills that may take much more time to develop or may never develop and would accept differences that may be unlikely to change. An alternative program to heavy academic demands is also possible, especially when the philosophy of the school embraces the concept of difference as normal and sets standards matched to student needs.

Adaptive programs would not assume that the student would "catch up" but would make sure that school was not a frustrating experience but a satisfying one. Perhaps reading instruction could be delayed or

could be taught in other than the prevailing method in which failure has occurred. Perhaps writing demands could be severely reduced, or a student or parent or peer tutor or peer secretary provided. At the same time, attempts could be continued to develop the skill. Emphasis on skill development could be limited; adapted performance could be encouraged and expanded. For some students there could be substitutes for the heavy emphasis on written language. More variety in subject content would be enormously helpful. For everyone, there would be more emphasis on intrinsic motivation and learning by wanting to know.

Regular Classroom Placement

It is not easy to respond to individual needs when there are 30 students in a class, but every teacher can vary amount of time for completion of assignments.

Can regular classroom teachers consider this kind of accommodating program? They can be asked to, they can be given assistance, and they can try. It is not easy to respond to individual needs when there are 30 students in a class. But every teacher can vary amount and time for completion of assignments. And sometimes they can group students and use alternative methods when the major method of instruction is clearly inappropriate.

If regular classroom teachers have an aide, have some training, have someone to consult when strategies are not working, and accept the philosophy of modification of curriculum, they can do a tremendous amount to help children achieve and feel good about themselves and the process of learning. But teacher effectiveness in modifying curriculum sufficiently will be limited without the philosophy, the aide, the training, the consultant, and alternative curriculums.

Varying curriculum demands is difficult for some teachers to consider. They frequently feel they have to explain to other students in the class why Suzie gets to do less of the math assignment, needs to finish only half of the phonics workbook sheet, or gets to have a peer tutor. It is possible to make this acceptable if adaptation for individual needs is available to all and if learning differences are accepted as normal. The teacher must accept it first and stimulate acceptance in the peer group

"Construction" and "Reduction"

Individuals may be genetically endowed with a specific amount of potential, which at the present time is not measurable, but how it develops depends on the environment in which the individual lives.

Piaget, Vygotsky, and Coles proposed that intelligence and cognitive abilities are "constructed" as the individual interacts with the environment physically, socially, and psychologically, and is mediated by adults and other children. Mediation is another word for communicating, teaching, and modeling. Children differ in the amount of mediation, teaching or direction they require in order to develop. Constructionists believe that children do not come into the world with cognitive development completed. It is developed as they grow

95

and experience things, events, places, ideas, and people. Individuals may be genetically endowed with a specific amount of potential, which at the present time is not measurable, but how it develops depends on the environment in which the individual lives.

In the education of LD and low-achieving students, lip service is given to theories, but the curriculum in most settings is based on a "reductionist" philosophy. This means a task analysis of the curriculum is developed, ranking the tasks from easy to difficult. Instruction frequently starts with the easy levels and proceeds as if learning were an addition process. To some extent that is true. But it is also true that a student may be able to understand a complex process and not remember the "easy" or simple parts. Witness children who cannot remember math facts, but understand the processes. Or another example is the student who cannot remember spelling patterns so that he can "decode" the reading material or master phonics, but can understand the content very well if it is read to him. Reductionist instruction can prevent a student from developing cognitively if the bulk of the instructional time is devoted to lower level skills and processes.

Drill and Practice – Options

For many students offered special education assistance, the day involves going from the regular classroom where drill and practice are the main fare to the resource room where drill and practice are also the main fare.

Often the student spends a great deal of time with workbooks and ditto sheets as assignments. The instruction time is spent in paper and pencil tasks . The teacher directs and controls the set of tasks. This frequently means boredom and sometimes embarrassment when the student must leave the classroom for the resource room for "special" teaching. For many students offered special education assistance, the day involves going from the regular classroom where drill and practice are the main fare to the resource room where drill and practice are also the main fare. They have limited opportunities to talk to each other or to the teacher. They listen and they mark ditto sheets or workbooks. Often they are bored, which compounds the problem of laboring at tasks that are difficult for them. There needs to be more trade-offs, incorporating experiential learning and emphasizing communication and interaction, which may be "out-of-seat" work but which provides a balance to drill and practice.

Many parents press for the drill and practice curriculum in their schools in the belief that this kind of education is "good" for children, that it provides discipline and promotes achievement. It sometimes can be an effective approach when the student has fairly evenly developed social-emotional, physical, and perceptual-cognitive skills. Yes, it is dreary, but not so serious for the student who is coping adequately with the curriculum or learning in spite of it.

The balance between drill and practice and structured enrichment is a critical matter for the learning disabled and low achievers. It is quite possible to have choices of curriculum types available in one school district. Many school districts include "open" schools, basic skill schools, traditional programs, programs for the gifted, and programs for the gifted-learning disabled, to mention just a few options. Parents can suggest to their schools boards that there be more choice in educational focus. If the parent is satisfied with the curriculum in the school, it can be a positive factor in the student achievement, but it can be debilitating for the student if there is unresolved conflict.

It doesn't seem reasonable that an enriched and more natural (though not unstructured) education should be reserved for those who already have the skills needed for school success (the gifted) and precluded for those whose skills are either evenly undeveloped (the low achiever) or unevenly undeveloped (the learning disabled). Parents would do well to consider this issue carefully when they work with the school to improve educational options for their children.

Integrated Learning

A large proportion of LD students aren't genetically or biologically inferior or different in the way they learn. They have learned. They haven't learned enough.

Parents would serve their children well if they understood that the stimulation and enrichment provided in programs for the gifted need also be provided for the learning disabled and the low achiever. A large proportion of these students aren't genetically or biologically inferior or different in the way they learn. They have learned. They haven't learned enough. If "active" learning builds cognitive structure or thinking skills, it should be a large part of the program of the learning disabled. Instruction is not yet so well developed that it is possible to tell exactly what stimulation will produce which kind of perceptual-cognitive skill. But active learning should not be precluded from the instructional program.

Much of the teaching in special education is out of context. The students never play the game of learning; they only practice some of the skills that are utilized in activities as part of the big curriculum plan.

It may be easier to understand the need for balance between drill and practice and structured enrichment if one thinks of playing tennis. Sometimes there is a need for practice to improve the backhand. Lots of time might be spent in practicing the backhand but all of this training would be useless unless the skill was used in playing the game. In the same way, much of the teaching in special education is out of context. The students never play the game of learning; they only practice some of the skills that are utilized in activities as part of the bigger curriculum plan. Frequently students need assignment adaptations so that they can participate, whatever their skill level. It is in

97

this participatory context that the skills can be generalized to meaningful activities. There must be an opportunity for the student to use the level of developed skill in varying situations because it is not possible to predict what the process of generalization requires.

Motivation for learning has a better chance of being maintained if the student is given plenty of opportunity to use a practiced skill. Structured teaching does not mean teacher control and the 3R's only. It means a carefully planned curriculum that includes opportunities for both cognitive growth and discrete skill teaching and provision for generalizing the skills taught. Some space should be provided for loving to learn.

Another example of out-of-context learning might involve learning to use the computer from the manual and practicing the commands as they are introduced. When one shifts to a needed, interesting activity and learns the commands as they are required, the "ah hah!" in learning is frequently achieved, and the commands are more readily learned and remembered.

Extras provided by an enriched curriculum are not "frills." They are the content that allows for more complex cognitive development, encourages the generalization of practiced skills, and maintains motivation.

Parents can participate with school staff in asking for an enriched curriculum. These extras are not "frills." They are the content that allows for more complex cognitive development, encourages the generalization of practiced skills, and maintains motivation. Most schools would welcome parent participation so that this kind of enrichment could be available to all.

Elementary/Secondary Concerns

In the elementary school where learning is focused on written language and arithmetic, and elaboration takes place in social studies, science, the arts, and physical education, parents and teachers are more likely to share beliefs in the kind of curriculum desired. When there are differences in opinion, they may fall into several categories. The "skill-frill" argument is always the first one. But other issues related to fostering independence, responding to teacher control, creativity versus conformity, or social and moral development as opposed to an "education only" point of view may also surface.

Basic issues of difference in educational philosophy do not evaporate in the secondary school. They are enlarged by concerns about preparation for college and employment. Parents have jurisdiction over when and how homework is done, extracurricular activities, choice of friends, and home responsibilities. These are not unimportant in school achievement. If both parents and teachers give the same

message, which has been jointly decided and frequently evaluated, chances are greater for changes and improvement. However, secondary education can be more difficult because there are many teachers who are interacting with one child.

Some Conclusions

Without creative personalities able to think and judge independently, the upward development of society is as unthinkable as the development of the individual personality without the nourishing soil of the community.

— Albert Einstein

The provision of special teaching for the LD student is based on the belief that general ability is adequately developed, and assistance needs to be provided in a few areas of deficit. As this is usually provided outside the classroom, the design of the student's education may become fractionated. Besides the perils of giving all special attention to the student for deficit behavior, the mainstream and resource room teachers may have difficulty in coordinating instruction so that social studies, science, and the arts do not conflict with the time periods used to provide special teaching in the resource room. These are subjects in which some of the higher level skills are developed, and interesting projects and ideas are likely to be explored.

However, the regular classroom may not provide this stimulation if the school philosophy does not encourage it. The format in special teaching involves short periods and is generally drill and practice. As the content usually consists of lower level discrete skills, such as phonics, handwriting, math facts, etc., the time when assistance is given is an important variable. We may easily rob Peter to pay Paul if great care is not taken. Parents, as they understand the issues about learning, can become its caretakers and insure good regular and positive special education for their children.

Chapter 7

Other Factors That Influence Educational Outcomes

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Commitments

The learning disability student is currently accepted as a student in whom there is a difference between ability and achievement. (With the low-achieving student, it is assumed that achievement is equal to ability.) If one considers an IQ test as an achievement test that measures some general aspects of learning grounded on the social and educational environment in which it occurred, one might say that the poor have fewer opportunities than those students raised in middle class families.

This difference in environment may account for the difference in scores, not lack of basic ability. In addition, the results of early interventions (Head Start and the Ypsalanti, Michigan, program "The Cognitive Curriculum") indicate that significant changes in IQ and achievement occur with stimulating curriculum interventions, interventions that simultaneously include the "basics" and begin as soon as students leave home and attend preschool programs. It is interesting to note that programs that have been successful in obtaining parent involvement regularly show positive results for students.

A warm and supportive teacher who has the ability to make all endeavors interesting creates positive learning experiences.

A warm and supportive teacher who has the ability to make all endeavors interesting creates positive learning experiences. Remember, all learning is essentially a social activity. Special education teachers are usually in the field of teaching because they get great satisfaction from the helping role. But most of their training is based on some of the questionable beliefs discussed earlier – i.e., focus on deficits and direct teaching.

For the parent, awareness is the key, and compensation or change is the answer. If parents feel their child is not making sufficient progress, is bored, or "turning learning off," they should not wait until the end of the year conference, but should initiate conferences on the regular schedule suggested earlier and learn to do some of the teaching that is needed. If social interaction is the basis of learning,

perhaps parents can improve their child's learning behavior by teaching him during homework time. Troubles usually occur when parent expectations are not realistic. But parents can overcome this if they are willing, have the time and a teacher who will teach them instead of saying, "Leave it to me." Parents can cultivate their child's interests and talents. It is particularly beneficial for parents to work in their children's schools to improve regular classroom education. Working as a teacher's aide or sharing a particular skill can enhance the education of all children in the class, and the parent may pick up skills that will come in handy when helping with homework.

Mainstreaming

When parents share in the extra planning and responsibility entailed in mainstreaming, the benefits of mainstreaming will be even more fully realized.

So far, the placing of large numbers of students in special class programs has not proved as beneficial as had been hoped. The emphasis now is on returning students to regular classrooms so that they are not stigmatized. In the regular classroom they have peers who model achieving behavior, and they are not deprived of curriculum areas outside of the 3R's, areas in which much of the opportunity for developing higher level skills and generalizing skills practiced in special education occurs. All through life students learn a great deal from each other just as they do from their parents. Many students need the variety, enrichment, and the independence in the curriculum that regular class placement often provides. It helps not only to develop more complex thinking but prevents boredom and keeps students from becoming totally dependent on extra assistance. It can help to preserve a precarious self-esteem. When parents share in the extra planning and responsibility entailed in mainstreaming, the benefits of mainstreaming will be even more fully realized.

The mainstream may not be the best environment for some children. That decision needs to be made on an individual basis. Some children do better if the group is small, if there are fewer visual and auditory distractions. Each degree of assistance (resource specialist in the regular classroom, resource specialist outside the classroom with individual or small group instruction, or special day class) has students for whom that choice would be appropriate. Such options mean more and better placement choices for parents and teachers in their efforts to meet the needs of students who cannot seek assistance elsewhere.

Tutoring

One of the least stigmatizing and disruptive interventions is tutoring outside of school for the mildly involved LD student. It has the advantages of—

- not identifying the student as inadequate before peers,
- offering instruction on a one-to-one basis,
- providing assistance in exactly those areas the student is finding difficult,

- using ongoing error analysis to renew teaching content,
- helping with homework and monitoring generalization of skills,
- dealing with organizational problems,
- offering a highly supportive, mediating relationship.

Tutoring has the disadvantage of being costly. To be effective, it should be scheduled at least twice a week and be provided by well trained professionals. It, too, usually focuses on deficit areas but is not accompanied by social stigma, and the student has the undivided attention of an adult who is structuring the experience for success.

If the program, the material, and the strategies are designed by well trained professionals, volunteer tutors can be effective.

There are occasionally a few tutoring resources in the community that involve volunteers. If the program, the material, and the strategies are designed by well trained professionals, volunteer tutors can be effective. Parents can ask the resource specialist to design the program and possibly spend some time with the tutor to explain the recommended teaching strategies.

Parent-Teacher Cooperation – An Essential Ingredient

An open, honest, and considerate exchange is always welcome. In a cooperative model, forthright discussions are essential as a basis for change and should not be viewed as attacks or as implications of personal inadequacy on the part of either participant. The teacher may need to hear that the student is unhappy in the classroom and feels picked on or disliked. The parent may need to hear that the teacher is frustrated by the student's behavior and needs the parent's help in setting limits. Sometimes there is a veiled wall of defensiveness, annoyance, impatience or outright hostility that permeates a meeting between the significant adults in the child's life. Both parents and teachers can experience these negative reactions, which can then prevent a productive discussion.

If each participant insists that theirs is the right or only view, the student will be the loser - which no one really wants.

Anger and blame will only get in the way of the changes that need to be considered although anger can frequently be the motivating force that brings about a forthright exchange. How anger is received is the critical factor. If the parent feels the teacher is not aware of the student's negative feelings, the teacher needs to acknowledge those views and indicate willingness to consider modifications that will ease the student's distress. If the teacher feels the parent is coddling, overprotecting, or not involved enough, the parent needs to consider that possibility. Views held by both parents and teachers need to be

brought into the open for discussion and modification. If each participant insists that theirs is the right or only view, the student will be the loser which no one really wants. As both parent and teacher have feelings that need to be respected, these discussions should be held with careful consideration for how the other will feel. A little diplomacy on both parts can go a long way toward achieving the goal: improved student performance and self-esteem.

Conflict Resolution

It is always better for the child if home and school are in harmony.

Intent to modify the situation, to improve student feelings and performance, to work cooperatively should provide a basis for conflict resolution. Parents and teachers are allies, not enemies. They are partners. It is the only comfortable role for either of them. If they cannot break down a wall of defensiveness or hostility, then another professional may need to be called in to bridge the differences – e.g., the principal or the school psychologist. If that fails, it is helpful to call on a professional outside the school. Parents have the responsibility, not just the right, to ask for a program that "works" for their child. Sometimes an outsider can help the school to change and sometimes can help the parent to change so that the child can have an optimum opportunity to learn. It is always better for the child if home and school are in harmony.

It may not be possible to provide optimum situations at every step of the academic way. There aren't unlimited options even if financial means are available. When the IEP is written, it includes a management process. But often the evaluation component is scheduled at wide intervals. This is why the suggestion for *frequent* parent-teacher meetings is so important.

Viable Alternatives

Sometimes all efforts to work cooperatively fail. Individuals on the school staff or the school philosophy may not subscribe to adaptive teaching in which the school is willing to change to accommodate differences in a mildly learning disabled child. Parents occasionally wish to move their children to other classrooms or to other schools within the district. Districts vary in allowing this option. Sometimes, if they are financially able, parents may find the rare regular private school that will accept students who need extra assistance. Occasionally, and more frequently, private schools are finding that many of the students in their populations have a variety of learning problems similar to the LD population, but possibly not so severe. More and more of these schools are providing tutorial assistance and hiring resource specialists.

Sometimes a private special education school in the area selects its student population so that students with severe behavior problems

are not served along with LD youngsters. Depending on the degree of severity, these two populations may require different curriculums and may not be served well in the same setting. The social environment for the mildly learning disabled is an important factor in their self-esteem and in their learning. And since this is so, parents need to ascertain the nature of the student population, the quality of the curriculum, the training of the staff, and the educational philosophy before enrolling their youngster in a private setting. Any change should be planned to last for at least a two-year period. It is difficult for students to move into a new social group and different school demands. However, students frequently feel more comfortable in special education schools where they are not the only one with special needs although with some, the message to the child is that placement in a special education school is another confirmation of inadequacy. Frequently, it is not possible to assess all of the pro's and con's, and parents must guess at the suitability of a placement change. It is often a chance one takes, hoping that the unknown will be better than the known.

Trying to work with the school in which the child is presently enrolled is the best first effort.

When the change is contemplated, parents would do well to become acquainted with the teachers their child will have for the next two years. Actually sitting in the class and noting the teacher's relationship with the children when they need assistance or when a child's behavior is inappropriate can be enlightening. It is easy to judge the curriculum by noting ongoing projects, availability of material, and display of children's work, its content and quality. Changing schools entails a good deal of thought and gathering of information. Trying to work with the school in which the child is presently enrolled is the best first effort. In that case, parents will have to work within the system, making whatever changes are possible and compensating for the shortcomings by providing the missing elements at home.

Whether the child is in a public school or private facility, parents know when there is too much homework or if the child does not understand it. They usually know if reading and spelling are improving, if the child can write reports without assistance, if math facts and processes are being mastered. Parents can share this knowledge with the teacher and make plans that will assist the child. In this way parents can assume the role of advocate. But it is a time-consuming activity, and it requires knowledge and effort and frequent teacher contacts.

Never Too Late

Parents cannot abdicate their educational responsibility if their children are not achieving. Nor can they blame the school for not "teaching" when they may not have known how important it is to have

taken an explicit role in developing their child's preschool skills. Parents have usually not had instruction in how to parent, so the issue is not a matter of blame. It is only recently that we have understood the importance of the early developmental period and the parent's role as teacher. Parenting education is clearly a widespread need.

Whenever a beginning is made, improvement can be an outcome.

But it is never too late to start! It has been said that "the brain improves with age." We now know that we are able to go on learning well into old age. If that is so, then whenever a beginning is made, improvement can be an outcome. One has only to note the many programs to assist LD students at the university level, including Stanford and Harvard and other university programs with extraordinarily high demands for scholarship. The existence of these programs indicates a belief in and acceptance of the abilities of this group of individuals as well as a commitment to provide assistance so that their potential for contributions to our society are not precluded.

Chapter 8

Teaching Children at School and at Home – A Review

Principles Reemphasized

Validating Strengths

Children who learn cooperatively - compared with those who learn competitively or independently - learn better, feel better about themselves, and get along better with each other.

— Alfie Kohn

Special educators have usually interpreted strengths in terms of modal preference. Modal preference is usually described as visual, auditory, and motor performance, and includes discrimination, sequence or memory as skills in any of these information processing modes. This observation is necessary and valuable because it allows teachers to know which skills to develop or to compensate for if there are clear indications of preference or weakness. However, a broader definition of strengths would also be of benefit to students. A strength would be anything a student does well or relatively well, has as an interest or hobby, or would like to learn something about. In this interpretation of strengths, modal processing is not the issue. Existing talents and personal preferences are the important issues here. They do not have to be developed in the special education sense. They are already functioning but may not be considered or exercised sufficiently in a special education program.

It is not uncommon for the strengths of a student to be listed on the Individual Education Plan (IEP). But it is most uncommon for plans to be set forth for validating or strengthening those skills, talents, and abilities. The assumption is made that the student has developed these abilities and they will grow and unfold on their own. To the contrary, unless exercised they may atrophy.

Validating and emphasizing strengths is one important way to prevent depression in LD students.

Validating and emphasizing strengths is one important way to prevent depression. Too many members of the learning disabled population are discouraged children. They are keenly aware of the effect their uneven development has on their academic and social status. The fact that they are receiving special assistance confirms this awareness. They know how they are doing in school and how they are viewed by others. They are not disabled in this knowledge. As long as the testing process, the placement process, and the instructional content are all focused on inadequacies, it will take a child

with extraordinary self-esteem to withstand the overwhelming, frequently debilitating, message in the assistance provided.

Validation needs to be overemphasized. As indicated earlier, very able students frequently view themselves as "retarded" when identified as learning disabled. The delivery of remedial services also usually means that the student must leave the classroom and be identified by peers as needing assistance. (This then is viewed by the student as inadequacy when special assistance is not offered to all.) This point is crucial. The students cannot defend themselves. The adults closest to them need to help them. To some extent, the negative status can be mitigated if teachers and parents balance this with situations in which the same students are seen as able – or if progress is immediate and visible to the student and the other students in the class.

Part of self-esteem comes from others expressing an appreciation of one's behavior or performance.

There is another dimension to this problem. These youngsters actually judge the inadequacy to be in themselves – not in their genes, not in an early illness, not in their parents, not in the teacher or teaching method, not in the testing, not in the program or in the school – but in themselves. They need adult assistance to put some balance in viewing their strengths with the skills they still need to master. Part of self-esteem comes from others expressing an appreciation of one's behavior or performance.

Many LD students have never been given an explanation of their difficulties. Most schools do not have programs that help students accept differences, not only their own but others as well. A primary source of self-esteem and self-concept as an adequate human being comes from a sense of accomplishment. That is why corroborating strengths is so important for children labeled learning disabled. It is why appreciating small gains is of utmost importance. When parents and teachers always have their sights on end objectives, it is easy to minimize or overlook small gains that need to be acknowledged and given approbation before peers.

Feelings of worth and self-esteem can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible - the kind of atmosphere found in a nurturing family.

— Virginia Satir

Teachers and parents can cooperate in setting up situations where validation is possible. For example, a student who has a collection can share it. If there is musical or dramatic talent, a performance can be arranged. If the talent or interest is being developed outside of school, then time can be taken in school to demonstrate and share so that peers have an opportunity to express approbation and appreciation.

Special tasks can be assigned and validation given publicly. Tutoring younger students can be arranged. If a student has made great progress in a subject studied in the resource room, opportunities for demonstrating the skill and being validated in the regular classroom can be provided. The student's work can be held up and attention called to how well it has been done. The possibilities are unlimited when validation is considered truly important.

In most situations, it will be up to the parent to ask that specific plans be included in the program to substantiate strengths. It is not enough just to list them – their cultivation must be deliberately planned.

Compensatory Activities

In order to insure continued general cognitive development, compensatory techniques should always be included in the planning so that material presented in social studies, science, literature is not precluded from the student's program. This can easily occur because of difficulties with written language, poorly developed attention, organizational or auditory processing skills, problems that are common in the LD population.

Parents need to learn to ask for compensatory activities as parallel strategies for emerging skills, strategies such as:

- tapes for textbooks or readers that are within the student's understanding but still foster reading skill,
- a computer or "secretary" when handwriting is a problem,
- spelling checkers,
- charts and calculators,
- tape recorders for homework assignments,
- a "buddy" system for cooperative assignments.

Compensatory techniques are limitless and dependent on the willingness of the adults to make the adjustments and to be creative.

Enrichment and Stimulation

When curiosity is dampened or suppressed, learning can easily become a joyless, mechanical occupation.

Earlier the point was made that with special education assistance, so much time is spent on drill and practice, little time is left for "interesting" activities involving projects that require integrative thinking and language skill. Not only is boredom likely to be the product of the singular drill and practice focus, but the outcomes may actually inhibit the very academic development being pursued. When curiosity is dampened or suppressed, learning can easily become a joyless, mechanical occupation. The student may retreat entirely and passively go through the required motions without any of the "reaching

out to learn" behavior that characterizes interest-based learning. Interest-based learning is more likely to be attached to previous learning and to generalize to new experiences and information.

Instructional Variables

Allowing more time to complete assignments and varying the amount of the assignment are two variables that every teacher can easily adapt to meet individual needs of students. For students with reading problems, literature, social studies, and science tapes are available so that the student gets the information and can participate in discussions even when the text is too difficult to read. As previously mentioned, computers, typewriters, peer or parent "secretaries" can relieve the sometimes enormous hurdle that writing presents to students with writing problems. Parents can ask for these accommodations, and teachers can learn how to individualize or group students so that these variation are possible in the classroom.

Major or Minor Changes

Frequently interventions will be planned, tried, and abandoned before the modifications have been made that would make the plan effective. Many changes may be required in order to make a plan work. It isn't unusual to hear, "I tried that and it didn't work" about plans or methods that were not given enough time or enough adjustments to bring about the desired behavioral or achievement changes.

Sometimes it will be evident immediately that the plan will not work. The child may rebel. The parent may not be able to be consistent because of other home or work demands. The teacher may not be able to find sufficient time to follow through with what was planned. These situations indicate the need for an immediate meeting to plan changes that *are* possible. For the child, perhaps a change in method, material, incentives, reinforcements, time or place of instruction, or instructor may make the plan viable.

Acceptance

Probably the first issue in meeting the needs of students who are different in learning behavior is the attitude of acceptance. Teachers sometimes do not welcome wide ranges of differences in their classroom because they have not been taught individualization techniques, not because they don't want to serve learning disabled youngsters. Most teachers are trained to work with students whose skills are fairly evenly developed.

The parent-teacher conference is the setting at which this issue can be aired and plans made to make the student feel more adequate and accepted. Teachers cannot make plans for situations about which they

have no awareness. In a country whose very existence is based on offering refuge to those who are different, there is no rationale for classrooms that can only serve similarities.

Positive Communication

Parents have described how powerful a child's response to a casual welcoming remark by a teacher can be. Children usually respond just as adults do when they feel valued. They feel good when someone compliments or welcomes them.

We live by encouragement and die without it - slowly, sadly, and angrily.

— Celeste Holm

Because the learning disabled very likely do not understand why they are having the problems in learning that they do, they tend to undervalue themselves. Planned yet seemingly casual remarks can do much to foster self-esteem. "It's nice to have you in this class, Robert." "You were a great runner on the playground today. I was watching you and you certainly are fast." "I noticed that you helped Joan carry that big box. That was very thoughtful of you, Jim." "Barbara, you look very cheery today. It makes me feel cheery, too."

However, these remarks will not eliminate the learning difficulties that the children are having, but they will not feel such outsiders. They need to be noticed positively and never, never be made to feel unwanted in the class. It is very easy for negative feelings to overwhelm the child and to contribute to the alienation from school and learning.

Planned casual, positive communications from the powerful adults in his life are essential to keep the student trying to be part of the learning community.

Planned casual, positive communications from the powerful adults in his life are essential to keep the student trying to be part of the learning community. If teachers forget, parents can remind them. If parents are too inclined to attend to negatives, teachers can remind them.

Clear, Consistent Rules and Consequences

Positive consequences are just as powerful, perhaps more so, than negative ones.

All groups must have rules that are followed by everyone. It is necessary for safety and for order. Parents need to know the classroom rules and to support them if they are reasonable. They need to be sure that their children know these rules and understand that their parents agree with the teacher. In addition to the rules, the students need to know what the positive or negative consequences will be. Positive consequences are just as powerful, perhaps more so, than negative ones, and parents can make sure that their children are aware of both options. Both teachers and parents need to be unanimous in supporting rules and consistent in applying the consequences. If a child sometimes manages to be on the receiving end of negative consequences, the parent needs to support his accepting them with good grace.

Classroom Discipline and Reinforcement

Our whole educational system is built on "right answers," which produces a great fear of making mistakes and stifles creativity.

— Arthur Combs

Parents have a right to ask that a teacher discipline children without yelling and without humiliation. The manner in which a teacher corrects a "wrong" answer or inappropriate behavior has a powerful effect on whether the behavior will continue or disappear or be modified. Because positive responses are so powerful in learning, it is especially helpful if the teacher always reinforces student behavior with a positive statement about what was good or appreciated. The following are examples of spontaneous (yet accurate) comments that will warm a child's heart:

"That was a good try, Bill. You're getting better all the time."

"I really like the fact that you raised your hand, Sue."

"Very good, Mark. It was the year 1492. Now can you remember the name of the ship?"

(To distract a child from a behavior that is interfering with group attention) "Randy, could you adjust that blind so that the sun isn't so bright?"

"Class, everyone has been such good listeners, I can tell you really liked this lesson, and I really enjoy teaching you. We'll continue tomorrow. Thank you, Randy, that helped us all."

Common Social-Emotional Issues

The Shy Child

Once the self-concept changes, behavior changes to match the freshly perceived self.

— Carl Rogers

Frequently the shy child needs adult assistance in participating in class activities and in initiating friendships. Parents may ask that plans be made in an attempt to reduce the shyness and to help the child risk being noticed. If the child is very quiet and retiring, the teacher can assign special monitor duties, ask the child for assistance with demonstrations or activities, or pair him with other children for school-related tasks so that familiarity will ease him into social relationships.

When plans are being made to reduce shyness, the teacher needs to be sensitive to the pain a child may feel on being spotlighted. Again, the teacher's request for assistance with valued tasks plus full praise may assuage the child's unease. If the youngster is not acutely

uncomfortable, continuing to call on and praise or thank him will make the situation less threatening. Frequent invitations to participate and sometimes rehearsing the behavior will dispel the reluctance to participate.

The Friendless Child

In some cases the child may display behaviors that are alienating others. Parents and teachers can help students become aware of their own contribution to their friendlessness by discussing incidents and other possibilities for behavior. They can also discuss common situations, using pictures to de-personalize the social issues. If they have the equipment, they can videotape the classroom and use the tape for discussions of alternate behaviors that might result in more positive social relationships.

It is also possible to assign children activities in which they work together with a common purpose in order to stimulate the possibility of friendship through familiarity. Group evaluation of social behavior can also be helpful, providing there are some ground rules about positive criticism.

The Restless Child

A long recognized behavior has now become a full fledged "disorder" termed Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

This long recognized behavior has now become a full fledged "disorder" termed Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). It is easy to see lack of attention, distractibility, impulsivity, and hyperactivity as an inadequacy in the child. However, when we come to treating the problem, we use, for the most part, external and social interventions.

It is important for parents to understand that this, indeed, may be a syndrome that is part of the child's personality, that it is "wired in," that it is part of the genetic makeup of this individual. Treatment interventions or modes for dealing with an Attention Deficit Disorder include:

Behavior Management Skills

Parents and teachers learn to use an identical response to the disturbing behavior. This requires deliberate home-school cooperation with clearly elucidated strategies.

Parenting Skills

Many times the behavior is exacerbated by familial responses that increase the difficulty. There may be difference in the way the father and mother feel the behavior should be handled. Parenting skills

involve clarifying family values as well as learning positive management strategies.

Therapy

A professional may be able to enhance the child's ability to acknowledge the problem and consider behavior options.

Counseling

The family may work with a counselor to bring to a level of awareness the stresses and strains within the family group that may be creating anxiety in the child and to determine solutions.

School

The school program needs to be scrutinized to determine if the curriculum is boring or over-demanding or if the daily scholastic routine is contributing to the restless behavior.

Physical Issues

Allergies can aggravate tendencies to restlessness and need to be either ruled out as issues or treated appropriately. Many students are helped by dietary changes that reduce allergic reactions to food additives, sugar, or chemicals.

Relaxation Therapies

Tapes, visual imagery, contracting and releasing the muscles in the body, meditation – all have a place in calming a child described as having attentional difficulties. Sometimes if parents relax with the child, the therapy may be more successful.

Biofeedback Training

This training can make the student aware of his own behavior and ability to control it. Neurobiofeedback is a newer variation of this training.

Medication

A psychiatrist or a pediatrician selects a medication appropriate to the needs of the child and monitors its effects.

The above interventions are the most commonly used when any of the behaviors associated with ADD appear. Parents would be well served to realize that the behavior may have many or a particular

combination of causes. It also would be valuable to realize that in the treatment of this behavior, a constellation of interventions is probably the most effective solution. Just diet or just medication will likely be insufficient as a "cure" for the problem, especially if the cause is even partly situational. Situational causes may be related to a traumatic event or to ineffective interactional processes in the family.

Written Language

When there are difficulties in reading, the following are suggestions for insuring continued cognitive development.

An incentive reading program should be started. A heavy emphasis on phonics instruction may preclude the development of other skills important in reading such as constructing meaning from the format, the pictures, or the context of sentences and paragraphs. The student reads books at a pre-determined "recreational level" (a year below the instructional level). Parents can get information on reading levels from the teacher or resource specialist and can ask a librarian to help select the books or can use student selections. The student reads silently and alone in areas of personal interest.

No matter how much phonics training a student has, reading for the story or for information should always be emphasized. This should be done daily for 20 to 30 minutes. The incentive (reward) is something the parent and child agree upon and is received weekly or at any other interval deemed appropriate based on the motivational level of the student and his ability to delay reinforcement.

Parents should be reading to young children and to older children who enjoy it, discussing the story, and linking it to experiences the children have had. This activity helps to keep books open as an avenue of enjoyment and a source of information. It also helps parents model their own interest in books as well as their thinking skills and their language skills.

In grades four and up, students should be reading with tapes in order to insure that they receive the information in the literature, science, or social studies textbooks. These tapes can be secured

from the school, the State Department of Education, or if the student is in a special education program, the Center for Blind Education. (Local librarians generally can provide information on sources of taped books.) Taped books are an excellent example of a compensatory technique that will allow the child to receive the information that he needs to participate in class discussions.

Remediation

Special education has provided a wealth of information about how to teach the LD student. The approach is generally a linear one, making the assumption that instruction should break up skills into components and teach from simple to complex or from small units to larger ones. Many parents who have children with serious reading problems have found that teaching phonics doesn't always mean the child will be able to read although teaching phonics may work for the student when reading is the only problem. Planning at all language levels is necessary for most learning disabled youngsters, and it would be helpful if one of the teacher's objectives was focused on developing motivation to read from personal interest as well. The same is true of mathematics. Literally hundreds of hours are spent on drill and practice on the facts, and many students are prevented from learning more complex concepts and processes. If they were allowed to compensate for their poor memories, they would enjoy math more. Handwriting presents the same dilemma. A great deal of time is spent on teaching penmanship and not so much on writing *processes*.

It has been mentioned earlier but cannot be too strongly emphasized that a total program of drill and practice frequently wastes time for children who are designated as learning disabled – i.e., able with some unevenly developed skills. Compensatory techniques, with major attention to the higher level skills (meaning in reading; content, form, and processes in writing; and concepts and processes in math) would likely produce more satisfying results. It is not suggested that skill or drill teaching be dropped, only that the focus be reversed.

Learning should be interesting and satisfying to children. Some of the hours in the school day should be spent in learning by doing, involving projects, action, and choice. Some time should be spent in activities that allow the children to give an adequate performance that is acknowledged not only by the teacher and peers but by the child himself. This aspect of school life is overlooked in too many children.

A balance should be struck between drill and practice on deficit skills and a highly structured program that involves active learning.

A balance is suggested between drill and practice on deficit skills and a highly structured program that involves active learning. The student is free to choose an activity and peers with whom he wishes to cooperate and has a goal, possibly as part of social studies, science, art or a school service project. The project has been planned by the teacher with goals and objectives that will increase the skills of the student in a variety of ways. Perhaps it will require research and library work, gathering information, and writing reports. Or it may involve building something. The use of the word "structure" usually means teacher control of student behavior and curriculum. Here it means teacher planning that offers opportunities for integrated learning and student self-direction and choice.

Some LD children require limits set by adults. This does not mean that the student is not allowed to exercise natural curiosity and extend personal interests. The child needs to come home and say, "Today was a neat day! We were studying frogs, and I saw some polywogs turn into frogs, and I got to hold one." Or "I got to share my shell collection in class, and everyone wanted to know where I found them." Or "We were studying the Fiji Islands. Their customs and their food and their houses are a lot different from ours."

When considering balance as a factor in education, parents need to be sure that the curriculum designed for their child extends and expands experience and maintains and encourages interest in learning.

When considering balance as a factor in education, parents need to be sure that the curriculum designed for their child extends and expands experience and maintains and encourages interest in learning. Most children are born curious. Special education should not dampen that natural behavior.

Final Words on Parent-Teacher Conferences

In a conference, progress is often minimized or ignored because the student is still not up to grade level. This can serve to increase the sense of inadequacy for everyone. The student needs to know where progress has occurred even if it seems minimal, and he needs to know what the priority goals will be for the next instructional period. This aspect of the process should never be minimized. It will keep the learning process active and positive. Parents need to be satisfied that the student is learning and is gaining on the grade level discrepancy. If that is not happening, then the whole instruction-placement program needs review. And during such reviews parents need to remind themselves to re-emphasize the student's strengths and interests and to be sure that they are continually validated.

Joint planning for students with difficulties in learning is critical for positive change. When parents and teachers cooperate, chances for improvement are more than doubled. Changes may need to occur on both sides. All participants need to come to the conference open to the possibility of changing their own beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Accepting the student's differences, possibly in speed of performance or in the amount that can be processed, are critical issues in working with this population.

If things are going well with a particular plan, and learning is proceeding satisfactorily, parents and teachers may want to focus on a new area that had not previously been considered a priority but that would now benefit from instructional attention.

Too often parents and teachers insist on an achievement goal that is unrealistic for a particular student. It is possible to consider reducing the amount of the assignment without compromising standards of accuracy. It is also possible to allow more time for a student who has difficulty with speed and to consider an alternate method of demonstrating competence. The notion of academic expectations based on average performance is pervasive in all of our beliefs. We need to remember always that with the able LD population, we are teaching children with differences who are sometimes far from average. Their success depends on our awareness of their need for curriculum adaptations while skills are being developed. We need to learn to accept differences in performance as normal student behavior.

The high calling of parenthood must be more adequately recognized, respected, and honored by our society. Therein lies the future of our nation.

— National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

There are no easy answers, no quick fixes, but parents and teachers working together can —

- establish mutual understanding of the problem,
- maintain realistic expectations for progress,
- distinguish between fact and opinion when discussing problems,
- obtain and share relevant information,
- value one another as participants and contributors to the student's well-being.

Such parent-teacher collaboration will ultimately contribute to the greater good of the individual child, the school, and the community.

Bibliography

Adelman, H. S. 1989. Toward solving the problems of misidentification and limited intervention efficacy. *Journal of Learning Disabilities,* 22:10.

Berrueta-Clement, J. R. 1984. Changed lives. (Weikert, D. *The cognitive curriculum*) Ypsilanti, MI: High Scope Press.

Chall, J. 1983. *Learning to read: The great debate*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Chess, S., and Thomas, A. 1986. *Temperament in clinical practice*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Clark, D.B. 1988. *Dyslexia: Theory and practice of remedial instruction*. New York: York Press.

Coles, G. 1987. *The learning mystique*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Delacato, C. 1963. *The diagnosis and treatment speech and reading problems*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Delacato, C. 1966. *Neurological organization and reading*. Springfield. IL: Charles C Thomas.

Doman, R., et al. 1967. Children with severe brain injuries: Neurological organization in terms of mobility. (Frierson and Barbe, eds. *Educating children with learning disabilities*) New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Dewey, J. 1980. *The child and the curriculum*. Baltimore: University of Chicago Press.

Dewey, J. 1938. *Experience and education*. New York: Collier-MacMillan.

Edelsky, C., Altwerger, B., and Flores, B. 1991. *Whole language, what's the difference*? Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.

Fernald, G. 1943. *Remedial techniques in basic school subjects*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Flesch, R. F. 1955. *Why Johnny can't read and what you can do about it*. New York: Harper.

Feuerstein, R. 1980. *Instrumental enrichment*. Baltimore: University Park Press.

Feuerstein, R. 1979. *The dynamic assessment of retarded performers*. Baltimore: University Park Press.

Frostig, M., and Horne, D. 1964. *The Frostig program for the development of visual perception*. Chicago: Follett.

Frostig, M., Maslow, P., Lefever, D.W., and Whittleseym, J. R. B. 1964. *The Marianne Frostig developmental test of visual perception*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Getman, G., Kane, E., and McKee, G. 1968. *Developing learning readiness: A visual motor tactile skills program*. Manchester, M0: Webster, McGraw-Hill.

Gesell, A. 1943. *The infant and child in the culture of today*. New York: Harper.

Gillingham, A., and Stillman, B.W. 1968. *Remedial training for children with specific disability in reading, spelling and penmanship*. Cambridge, MA: Educators' Publishing Service.

Goldstein, K. 1939. *The organism*. New York: American Book Company.

Goodman, K., and Goodman, Y. 1981. *What's whole in whole language?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hinshaw, S. 1991. Attention deficit disorders (lecture). Parents' Educational Resource Center.

Hinshelwood, J. 1917. *Congenital word blindness*. London: Lewis.

Hunt, J. McV. 1961. *Intelligence and experience*. New York: Ronald.

Ilg, F. L., and Ames, L. B. 1964. *School readiness*. New York: Harper Row.

Jastak, J. F., and Wilkinson, G.S. 1984. *The wide range achievement test - Revised*. Wilmington, DE: Jastak Associates, Inc.

Kephart, N. 1963. *The brain-injured child in the classroom*. Chicago: The National Society for Crippled Children and Adults.

Kirk, S. A., McCarthy, J. J., and Kirk, W. D. 1968. *The Illinois test of psycholinguistic abilities - Revised. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.*

Lerner, J. 1981. *Learning disabilities, theories, diagnosis, and teaching strategies* (3rd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Levin, H. 1988. Accelerated learning conference. Stanford University.

Orton, S. T. 1937. *Reading, writing and speech problems in children*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Piaget, J. 1952. *The origins of intelligence in children*. New York: International Universities Press.

Reynolds, C. R., and Mann, L. 1987. *Encyclopedia of special education*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Shepard, L. A., and Smith, M. L. 1990. Synthesis of research on grade retention. *Educational Leadership*.

Slingerland, B. H. 1971. *A multisensory approach to language arts for specific language disability children*. Boston: Educators' Publishing Service.

Smith, F. 1971. *Understanding reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Spock, B. M. 1985. *Baby and childcare* (rev.). New York: Pocket Books.

Terman, L. M., and Merrill, M. A. 1972. *Stanford-Binet intelligence scale*. (3rd rev.). Iowa City: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Thompson, M. M. 1951. *An outline of the history of education* (3rd ed.). New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc.

Vellutino, F. R. 1987. Dyslexia. *Scientific American* 256:3.

Wechsler, D. 1974. *Wechsler intelligence scale for children - revised*. Cleveland, OH: Psychological Corporation.

Wepman, J. M. 1974. *Auditory discrimination test*. Palm Springs, CA: Research Associates.

Woodcock, R. W., and Johnson, M. B. 1977. *The Woodcock-Johnson psycho-educational battery*. Allen, TX: DLM Teaching Resources.

Appendix I

GOALS FOR IMPROVING HANDWRITING

Choose one, at the most two, and write at the top of the writing page.

1. Line relationships (Consistently in line)
2. Visual shift difficulties (Letter or word on different line or space from model)
3. Line quality (Wavery)
4. Pressure (Even, too dark, or too light line quality)
5. Slant (Consistent)
6. Letter Formation
7. Spacing between letters (Consistent)
8. Spacing between words (Consistent)
9. Orientation of letters correct
10. Transpositions
11. Differentiation between large and small letters (Consistent)
12. Sentence completely copied in space provided
13. Omission of letters
14. Omission of word
15. Insertions
16. Erasures (+ for no erasures; 0 for erasures)
17. Write overs (Without erasures) (+ for no write overs; 0 for write overs)
18. Capital
19. Period
20. Fluency (All skills functioning adequately)

Appendix II

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

This checklist provides topics that may need to be discussed at each conference.

	VALIDATION	*INSTRUCTION*
1. Personal		
Appearance		
Organizational skills		
Time		
Desk		
Papers		
Interests (art, music, drama, sports etc.)		
Clubs		
2. Social		
Peer Relationships		
Individual/Social Awareness (Feelings)		
Group Relationships		
Games, clubs		
Adult Relationships		
Home		
School		
School Placement (Class)		
3. Emotional		
Mood		
Happy		
Depressed		
Variable		
Aggressive		
Withdrawn		
4. Behavioral Style		
Activity level		
Independence/dependence		
Persistence		
Impulsivity/reflectivity		
Motivation		
Speed		
5. Physical		
Medical (Disease, Allergies, Etc.)		
Nutrition		
Rest		
Gross Motor		
Fine Motor		
Sports		
Drugs/Sex		

	VALIDATION	INSTRUCTION

6. Academic/Cognitive

Attention _____
- Span (Home/School)
- Self Monitoring (Specific goals/Strategies)

Homework _____
- Rate
- Amount
- Independence
- Completion

Memory _____
- Short Term
- Long Term
- Strategies

Listening _____
- Comprehension
- Auditory Discrimination
- Self Monitoring (Specific goals/Strategies)

Speaking _____
- Organization of Thought
- Sentences
- Vocabulary
- Articulation
- Self Monitoring (Specific goals/Strategies)

Reading _____
- Comprehension
  (Language Experience,
  Vocabulary, Grammar)
- Decoding
- Speed
- Recreational Reading

Writing _____
- Structure of Paragraph
- Structure of Report
- Use References
- Mechanics (Punctuation, Spelling)
- Spontaneous/Creative
- Amount

Spelling _____
- List
- Spontaneous

Handwriting _____
- Letter Formation
- Perceptual Skill
- Motor Skill
- Fluency/Speed

123

	VALIDATION	INSTRUCTION
Arithmetic		
Language		
Counting		
Concepts		
Processes		
Other Curriculum Areas		
Science		
Social Studies		
Music		
Art		
Physical Education		

About the Author

Annabelle Most Markoff is presently Director of the Parent's Educational Resource Center which serves parents of youngsters with learning disabilities. She has a rich professional background in education, including: an assignment as regular elementary classroom teacher with remedial reading specialty acquired in training with Grace Fernald at UCLA; teacher of the educationally handicapped in California; Experienced Teacher Fellowship at San Francisco State University and the University of California at Berkeley where she obtained her PhD in Curriculum for Low Achieving Students; adjunct associate professor at San Francisco State and San Jose State Universities; and Educational Director of the Markoff School in San Mateo, California.

Her publications include *The Learning Assistance Inventory, Teaching Low Achieving Children - Reading, Spelling and Handwriting,* and *The Quick Cognitive Inventory.*

Serving the field of special education since 1963, *Academic Therapy Publications* offers a wide range of remedial texts, perceptual and motor assessments, books for teachers and diagnosticians, learning aids for children, and materials for parents—all described in a free catalog available on request.

Academic Therapy Publications
20 Commercial Boulevard
Novato, California 94949-6191

ISBN: 0-87879-953-9

BEST COPY AVAILABLE